

# mindfields

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL ABOUT IDEAS AND LEARNING

VOL 1, ISSUE 1, FIRST QUARTER 2007 Rs 50



## THE VIRTUES OF NOT KNOWING

Visit a museum  
without losing  
your nerve

What really happens  
to children who go to  
alternative schools?

Why is a cow  
and other  
deliberations

7 things to do in Goa  
with your children

Reclaiming  
the outdoors

Fairy tales: old tales,  
new reality



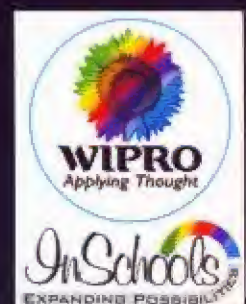
# WIPRO GOES BACK TO SCHOOL!

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## mindfields

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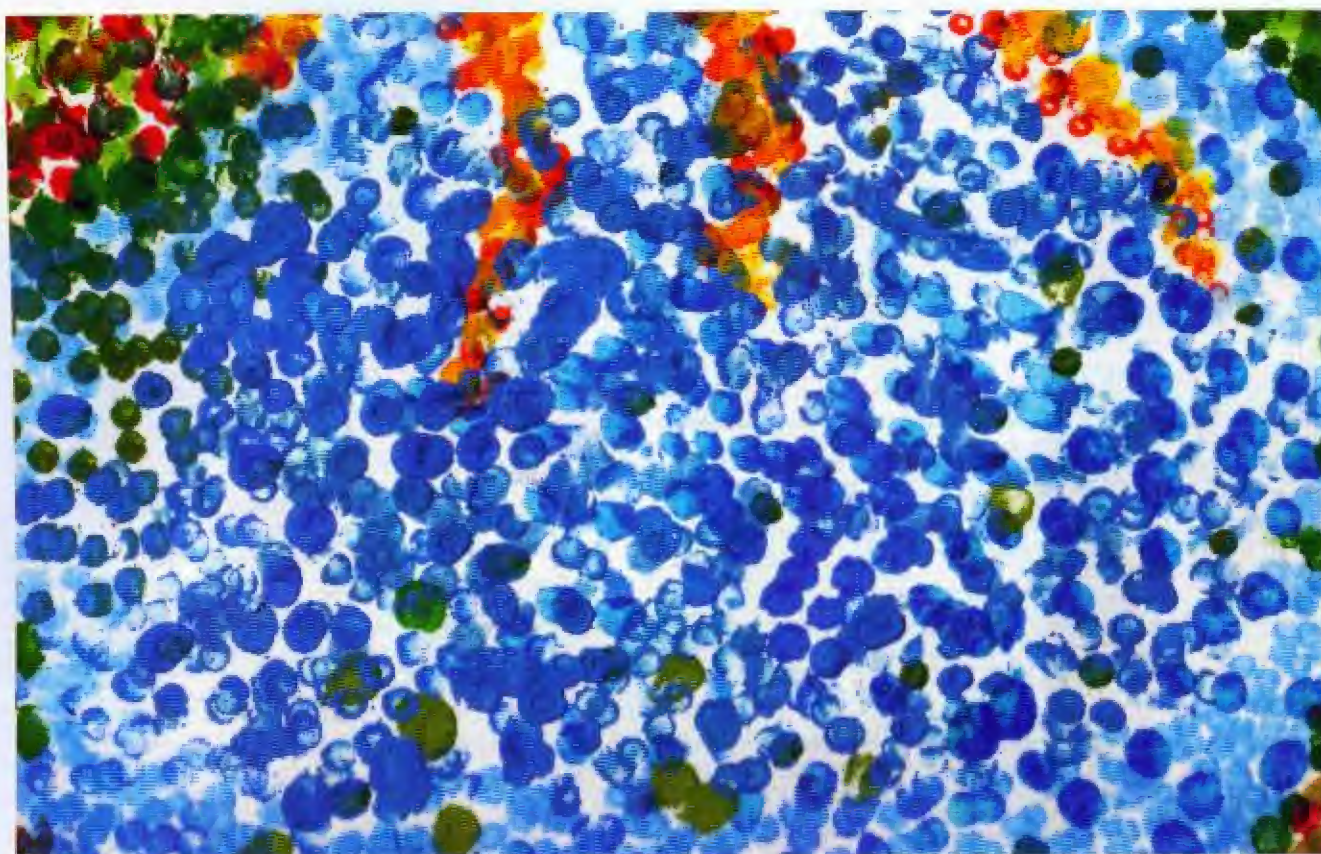
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# VIRTUES OF NOT KNOWING

ADAPTED FROM ELEANOR DUCKWORTH'S  
WORK BY SHWETA ANAND ARORA

Of all the virtues related to intellectual functioning, the most passive is the virtue of knowing the right answer. It requires no decisions, carries no risks, and makes no demands. Moreover, in conventional views of intelligence it tends to be given far too much weight.

## KNOWING THE ANSWER

In most classrooms, it is the quick right answer that is appreciated. Knowledge of the answer ahead of time is, on the whole, more valued than ways of figuring it out. Similarly, most tests of intellectual ability seek to establish what children have already mastered. True, intelligence tests require that certain things be figured out, *but the figuring out doesn't count.*

No tester will ever know and no score will ever reveal whether the right answer was a triumph of imagination and intellectual daring, or whether the child knew the right answer



ALEC'S IDEA WAS WRONG, BUT IT WAS HIS CUSTOMARY WILLINGNESS TO PROPOSE IT AND DEFEND IT THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR A MORE ACCURATE IDEA.

all along. In addition, the more time the child spends on figuring things out on the test, the less time there is for filling in the right answers; that is, the more you actually *think* to get the right answers on an intelligence test, the less intelligent the results will look.

I would like to give some attention to what is involved when the right answer is *not* already known.

### AN EXAMPLE

I once watched a class of 10-year-olds while they learned about pendulums. In the class, there was a boy named Alec who would be any teacher's joy. He was full of ideas, articulate about them, and thoughtful and industrious about following them through.

After a number of weeks of working with pendulums, the class watched some film loops in which a pendulum dropped sand as it moved, thus leaving a record of its travels. One question the students considered was, when a pendulum is swinging back and forth, does it slow down at each end of its swing, or does it maintain the same speed and simply change direction? Alec, who was something of a mathematician by inclination, finding merit more readily in deduction than in experience, quickly maintained that the pendulum did not slow down at the ends, "because there's no reason for it to."

The other children tended to agree, because the first opinion came from Alec. The teacher said nothing, but continued playing the loop in which the sand was falling into a row of straws.

After a while, one child said, "I don't get it. Why isn't it the same all along the straws, then?" There was silence again as they continued to watch. Another child said, "There's more at the ends; it piles up at the ends." Other remarks came: "How come it isn't higher in the middle because it goes back and forth over the middle?" "It probably goes fast over the middle and slows down at the ends." "Besides, how can it stop without slowing down?"

Gradually, the comments added up. At last one child dared to commit himself: "It has to be slowing down at the ends." And one by one, each child committed himself to an opinion that was the opposite of Alec's. Alec, who was used to being the only one to hold to a given opinion, took a long time to get convinced by their reasons, but finally he changed his mind.

The class played out virtues concerned with courage, caution, confidence, and risk. The courage to submit an idea of one's own to someone else's scrutiny is a virtue in itself - unrelated to the rightness of the idea. Alec's idea was wrong, but it was his customary willingness to propose it and defend it that paved the way for a more accurate idea. The other children were right, but they would never have arrived at that right idea if they had not taken the risk - both within themselves and in public - to question Alec's idea.

In this example, a problem was set for the children, and we saw what was involved in trying to resolve it. Another whole domain of virtues we have not even mentioned is that of sitting alone, noticing something new, wondering about it, framing a question for oneself to answer, and sensing some contradiction in one's own ideas - in other words, all of those virtues that are involved when no one else is present to stimulate thoughts or act as prompter.







## CONCLUSION

The virtues involved in not knowing are the ones that really count in the long run. What you do about what you don't know is, in the final analysis, what determines what you will ultimately know.

It is, moreover, quite possible to help children develop these virtues. Providing occasions such as the one described here, accepting surprise, puzzlement, excitement, patience, caution, honest attempts, and wrong outcomes as legitimate and important elements of learning, easily leads to their further development. And helping children to come honestly to terms with their own ideas is not difficult to do. There was nothing particularly subtle in the role of the teacher in this example.

It would make a significant difference to the cause of intelligent thought in general, and to the number of right answers that are ultimately known, if teachers were encouraged to focus on the virtues involved in not knowing, so that those virtues would get as much attention in classrooms from day to day as the virtue of knowing the right answer. ■

## ABOUT ELEANOR DUCKWORTH

- Eleanor Duckworth is a Professor Of Education at Harvard University and a former student of Jean Piaget.
- She is a leading authority on education, especially on the ways in which children learn.
- While teaching, she uses the method of creating situations in which the child gets all excited about learning.
- In her approach, the teacher listens and the child does the explaining. She values the learner's experience and insights.
- She has developed an approach to teaching and learning which she calls 'Critical Exploration'.
- Her focus is on creating deep meaningful learning of concepts rather than covering the syllabus, or learning formulae.
- She has authored several books including 'The Having of Wonderful Ideas' and 'Tell Me More: Listening to Learners Explain'.





## THE UNFOLDING STORY OF PUSHP NIKETAN

IT HAPPENS ALL THE TIME, A SLOW TRICKLE FROM VILLAGES AND TOWNS GATHERING AT THE HELMS OF A METROPOLIS, IN HOPE OF A LIVELIHOOD, OR IN PURSUIT OF A DREAM. LESS COMMON ARE THE STORIES OF A CITY REACHING OUT TOWARDS THE VILLAGES. THIS IS ONE SUCH JOURNEY.





SUGAR MILL COMPLEX AT DHAMPUR

Hundred and ninety eight kilometers is not a long way off, but if you have made your way from Delhi to Bijnor behind a slow crawl of sugarcane-laden numberplate-less automobiles, you feel the distance acutely.

The sugar mill is the most famous thing about this town, indeed, it is the hub around which all social and professional activities here revolve. We were in Dhampur in pursuit of a teacher (*see Harendra Chand's interview*), but ended up profiling Pushp Niketan School, nestled in the grey sugar mill complex.

What is now the school was once a sugarcane laboratory. In true small-town quaintness, there is much that the school still needs to get into place, but Pushp Niketan school has airy, light-filled classrooms, playground, auditorium, and sports facilities. Another thing it has is a small band of devoted teachers. Here are the stories of three people whose efforts keep the fledgling but ambitious project going.

#### ABANDONED SUGARCANE LAB TO PROGRESSIVE SCHOOL



*Robit Sood headed the team that incubated the Pushp Niketan Project from September 2005 to December 2006.*

#### WHAT WAS IT LIKE IN THE BEGINNING?

When I joined, the sugarcane laboratory had just been transformed into a school. I took over from the rather overwhelming figure of iDiscoveri's Ronnie Gulati. Which was not easy because everyone thought I was this rank *baccha*. Age and image was an issue, but once I started spending time with the parents, having conversations with them about what we had in mind, they began to trust me more. It was an exciting time.

#### WHAT SORT OF A SCHOOL DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?

After completing my schooling in Mirambika (Delhi),



I have undergone their 3-year diploma in progressive education, then helped set up Fareh Public School in Ranthambore. We wanted to bring the best progressive teaching practices to Pushp Niketan.

IT'S HARD ENOUGH GETTING PARENTS IN LIDIES TO THINK BEYOND CONVENTIONAL SCHOOLS. HOW DOES ONE MANAGE IN A PLACE LIKE DHAMPUR?

We met the same apprehensions – are the kids learning 'enough' when you teach them like this? What sort homework is it when all the kids do, for example, is collect leaves? Why aren't you completing the portion in textbooks? We start off with a disadvantage here as opposed to at a Mirambika, because parents are not converts to the ideology already.

SO HOW DO YOU STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE CURRICULA FOLLOWED BY SCHOOLS IN THE REST OF COUNTRY, AND WHAT IS BEING FOLLOWED HERE AT PUSH PNIKETAN?

We have NCERT and CBSE textbooks in our library, and we use them as reference material in planning our lessons. Subjects like Math are taught step-by-step, based on a set of learning outcomes.

YOU MOVED HERE WITH A FEW HANDPICKED TEACHERS, A SMALL GROUP OF TEACHER TRAINERS FROM DISCOVERI CENTRE FOR EDUCATION AND ENTERPRISE SHUTTLED BETWEEN DELHI AND DHAMPUR. WHAT WAS THE GOAL IN THE TIME THAT DISCOVERI WAS FOSTERING THE PROJECT?

We wanted to make sure that the core team of teachers would reach a level of self-sufficiency where they could set up a classroom, plan their teaching effectively, handle parents...and most importantly, keep the momentum going. They needed to be prepared enough to take new people into their fold. The other important thing was being able to find the right people to step in as school principal and curriculum co ordinator at the end of our time here. Which we have managed to do. Quite successfully, I think. Rajesh and Nisha (the new principal and curriculum coordinator) are extremely enthusiastic.

YOU HANDED OVER CHARGE TO THEM IN DECEMBER 2006. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE GREATEST CHALLENGES THEY WILL FACE?

The school is growing, and there is going to be a continuous need for quality teachers. As of now, only three or four teachers out of the team of nine are locals. It isn't practical to bring teachers in from other cities indefinitely. The school will need to train local talent as teachers. They also need about hundred more admissions to make the school financially viable. ■



### A CLASSROOM SHOULD BE LIKE A KABAADIKHAANA

*Harendra Chand is one of the senior teachers at Pushp Niketan Dhampur.*

FROM BALESOE, ORISSA TO BIJNOR, UTTAR PRADESH...

Yes. It has been a journey. After an Education Honors degree, I trained at Mirambika School, Delhi. Taught at a CBSE school in Gaya (Bihar), then at Auroville, and now, Dhampur!

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BE A TEACHER?

I did not really start with any great faith in the educational system in India. Was always the *tedha* sort who had to question everything. I used to run a business of my own, making *donas*...those disposable containers made from leaves...used to do this between classes while I was studying. Teaching came my way. I was keen to make it on my own without my parents' help.

WHAT WAS THE MIRAMBIKA EXPERIENCE LIKE?

Very hard, to begin with. There was some frustration with the rigidity of their structure. I think the hardest lesson was one of the earliest...the discipline of being still and observing the world around me without any distractions. It was very difficult, but self-evolution starts from being still and observing. Being able to observe things well is very important for a teacher.

AN IMPORTANT REALIZATION WHILE TRAINING TO BE A TEACHER...

Not everyone who is a teacher needs to be super intelligent. But you need to be a person who can connect with children with a lot of love and attentiveness.

ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF PARENTS YOU HAVE OBSERVED...

There are some hi-fi parents who only send their children to alternative schools because of the snob value. The second





HARENDRA CHAND'S CLASSROOM

kind have full understanding of the school's ideology and full faith in the teachers. The third kind are full of questions... they have *hazaar* questions, but hate to step into the process or involve themselves too much. The third kind are the most difficult!

**YOU HAVE TAUGHT AT A CONVENTIONAL CBSE-BOARD SCHOOL TOO. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO TAKE YOUR IDEOLOGY TO A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL?**

I tried to do the best I could with the textbook. Rather than teach directly from the book, I tried to connect it up with their town, their culture, things that they understand... and *then* teach about things that are far away.

The glaring problem with a school like this is in the conflicting demands placed by teachers whose own teaching methods are not similar. Children learn in a free environment in my class, and then as soon as the bell rings, in walks somebody who scolds, threatens and punishes them. The contrast is too stark.

**WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE IN THE KIDS FROM URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOLS...**

The saying 'children around the world are the same' is true! The only thing is that city children are less eager than the kids in smaller towns, they have seen too much too soon.

**YOUR TRICK TO CREATING A BEAUTIFUL PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN YOUR CLASSROOMS...**

(Laughs) Beautiful? *Bacche ka class kabadikhuana hona chahiye.* (Children's rooms should be like a scrap dealer's

shop). That is the environment that they like the best. There is no need to be a neat freak. When you need to get a message across, lead by example. A gentle reminder is enough. Messiness does not mean lack of hygiene though. I think displaying childrens' work all over is a must.

**ON NEW CHILDREN ENTERING YOUR CLASS ENVIRONMENT...**

When children come from a new school, they initially feel superior to the children in class because they cram so much more in other schools. I just let them be. They watch from the fringes for some days, and then, without a word, they come to their own realizations and become one with the group!

**HOW HAVE YOUR IDEAS ABOUT EDUCATION CHANGED OVER THE YEARS**

They haven't. *Education pey to abhi bhi bharosa nahi hai, lekin ab apne aap pey bahut bharosa hai.* (I still don't have much faith in the education system, but I have faith in myself).

**YOUR BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH ADMINISTRATORS AT SCHOOL...**

They all seem to start with good intentions, but it fades away very soon. The other big thing is transparency. A lot of organizations like to talk about transparency, but they don't run like that. Administrators need to involve teachers in any big decision making... *nahi to teacher silent ho jaata hai. Sochta hai, principal bada hai, aur hum chhote hain.* (Otherwise the teacher's voice is silenced. He begins to feel that the principal is someone superior, and that he is an inferior being.)



#### WHAT DO YOU DO OUTSIDE OF CLASS?

Often, after school, an informal bunch of children from the *sarkari* school gather and I organise games and activities for them. It's a change for them after their boring school life. I play cricket with my brothers sometimes. I'm not so interested in watching films or making new friends.

#### YOU MET YOUR WIFE LAXMI AT AUROVILLE, AND SHE SHARES YOUR PASSION FOR TEACHING...

Yes! We even talk about teaching when I help her in the kitchen. I chop the vegetables, she cooks, and still school does not leave us.

#### WHAT'S IN THE BAG YOU TAKE TO SCHOOL EVERYDAY?

No bag for me. I carry one or two *copies* or nothing at all.

#### WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

One-sided paper. Colors. Scissors. Pencils. So that kids can engage in their own creative work as soon as they have finished what they are supposed to do in class.

#### WHAT IDEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY HAS AFFECTED YOU MOST?

I am not a big reader, I like to try things out first-hand rather than read bookish things. I am affected by the teachings of Aurobindo and the Mother, but I will gather new ideas from wherever I find them. *Aakhir yeh bhi to sochne wali baat hai ki apni khud ki philosophy kya hai.* (Its worth thinking about what one's own philosophy is.)

#### IF NOT A TEACHER, THEN WHAT...

I can probably do any sort of work if I had to, but I would always know that nothing would utilize my mind better than teaching does.

#### ARE YOU IN TOUCH WITH ANY OF YOUR EX STUDENTS?

I made a conscious decision not to do that. If they need me, they know they can always reach me. It is good to allow children to get new people in their life. They need to grow and foster new influences and relationships. What is the use of making them cling to you? ■

#### SCHOOL AS THE CULTURAL HEART OF THE TOWN



*Major Rajesh Ranjit and his wife Nisha have joined Pushp Niketan as the new principal and curriculum coordinator, respectively.*

#### SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION IN THE INDIAN ARMY, STINTS AT 'FIVE STAR' SCHOOLS IN BANGALORE AND DELHI. HOW DID DYNAMIPUR HAPPEN?

We both have a background in alternative education, Nisha was teaching at a progressive school called TVS academy in Tumkur, near Bangalore. The other stints were for experience and exposure. The long-term plan was always to get back into meaningful grass-root level education. The Pushp Niketan assignment is a dream come true.

#### WHAT DO YOU BOTH ASPIRE TO DO WITH THE SCHOOL?

We plan to bring in high-quality thematic/ inquiry-based, child-centered education methodologies to small towns and rural settings. Pushp Niketan would be our pilot venture.

#### YOU HAVE BEEN HERE FOR A MONTH NOW. WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

It feels like we have been here a lot longer. Things and people seem so familiar. It's amazing to work in a small set-up where there is so little beaureaucracy involved. There are nine teachers here apart from Nisha and I, and we work in school all day, take a short break in the afternoon, and get back together to talk about school again. No one treats it like a job!

#### THE PLACE IS ABUZZ WITH ACTIVITY...

Yes. We have a cultural program here tonight. A dance recital by Nisha and a sitar performance by



some musician friends from Delhi. The event is open to parents and the public. We plan to do these things as often as we can.

IS IT TO EXPOSE THE PUBLIC TO NEW ART FORMS?

Not just that. It's also to create a feeling of camaraderie and oneness with the school amongst more people than just the children who come here in the day time. We would like the school to be like the cultural heart of the town, where everyone comes together.

WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES IN FRONT OF YOU?

Striking a balance between providing children with an education that is progressive even as it enables them to take on real-life challenges. Not everyone comes from a wealthy home with a family business to fall back on. These children are going to have to go and take common entrance exams and compete with children from mainstream schools for seats in professional colleges. They need to be ready for that, and we owe that much to the parents.

On the administrative front, we are planning to convert the old godown next to the school into a residential facility for students who have to travel large distances to get to school.



HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ADDRESS THE NEED FOR TEACHERS FAMILIAR WITH ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING? AND WHAT ABOUT TEACHER DEVELOPMENT?

We have initiated a small-scale training institute with a view to induct local teachers into the school. Also in the pipeline is a small-scale English institute, and a resource pool of people who will visit Dhampur to conduct workshops and share expertise. We'd like them to meet as many people from outside Dhampur as possible! ■



ENTRANCE OF PUSHP NIKETAN SCHOOL; (LEFT) GODOWN TO BE CONVERTED INTO HOSTEL

#### VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

IN THE FIELD OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING, COMMUNICATION SKILLS, MEDITATION, SOCIAL WORK/ RURAL DEVELOPMENT, TEACHER TRAINING, MUSIC, ART AND CRAFT.

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## RECLAIMING THE OUTDOORS

THE LOSS OF CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR PLAY AND CONTACT WITH THE NATURAL WORLD IMPACTS THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHOLE CHILD... IT ALSO SETS THE STAGE FOR A CONTINUOUS LOSS OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

MINDFIELDS TEAM WITH INPUTS FROM  
MADHU SUDAN AND RACHITA SINGH

### SHRINKING PLAYGROUNDS

Summer Vacation 1985. Kavita, 11, had just returned from boarding school in the Vindhya to her home in a middle class Delhi colony. She eagerly anticipates going over to her best friend Avni's house the next day. They love playing in the colony park, watching the birds and squirrels and sometimes going over to the market nearby to buy ice cream or sweets.

That is an improbable scene now. Even as recently as the 1990s, children had access to the natural world around them and the general, even if urban, world around them. A major part of their recreational time was spent outdoors – exploring wooded areas around, sidewalks, streets, greenways, and parks.

The radius of the activity area has shrunk significantly. It was not unusual for children to regularly wander off to areas 400 to 500 meters away from their homes to play. Parents would only start getting alarmed or rather, annoyed if they did not return home on time.



GREAT THINGS ARE DONE WHEN MEN AND MOUNTAINS MEET,  
THIS IS NOT DONE BY JOSTLING IN THE STREET.

William Blake, Notebooks (1793)



But increasing concretization of cities and even smaller towns isn't the only deterrent to children being in the outdoors.

#### A CULTURE OF FEAR

Even in areas where trees, birds and parks are available, children just aren't going outdoors as much. Children are, instead, glued to the Internet, computer games and TV. Children in general have lost touch with the outdoor world, fields, streams and woods. Society has told them their future is in technology and electronics.

While there is nothing inherently wrong in using these 'electronics' moderately, children's lives are largely out of balance. Well meaning parents and teachers may teach children about the Sunderbans or the Amazon rain forests, endangered species and wildlife, but do little to encourage children's personal relationship with the outside world.

An extinction of this experience breeds apathy towards environmental concerns. According to Stephen R. Kellert, a social ecologist at Yale, society has become "so estranged from its natural origins, it has failed to recognize our species' basic dependence on nature as a condition of growth and development."

Disregard among children for the environment is largely due to lack of understanding. In general, children do not understand the long-term implications of damage to the environment (not recycling, pollution, littering – other poor environmental choices).

Not only does the loss of outdoor play and contact with the natural world impact the growth and development of the whole child and their acquisition of knowledge, it also, in the long run, sets the stage for a continuous loss of the natural environment.

Many children do not even roam their own neighborhood or yards unless accompanied. A culture of fear has parents fearing for the safety of their children. Perhaps rightly so, given today's urban environment.

#### REINTRODUCING CHILDREN TO THE OUTDOORS

Young children especially need the broad experiential base provided by being outdoors. According to John

Dewey, the knowledge children gain in the outdoors is foundational to literacy and science learning.

Any casual survey of adults will show a high quotient of happy memories of the outdoors some of which may have been instrumental in their development. The best way to teach children about how to care for the environment is to expose them to positive experiences in the outdoors under the care and supervision of suitable role models.

Originally, **Outdoor Education (OE)** was confined merely to nature study but it has now emerged as a broad multi-disciplinary and multi-activity form of education. OE is a means of curriculum enrichment, whereby the process of learning takes place out of doors.

Simply put, OE is the use of the outdoors for educational purposes. It broadly includes environmental education, conservation education, adventure education, school camping, wilderness therapy and aspects of outdoor recreation.

#### OUTDOOR EDUCATION v/s PICNICS

While one cannot undermine the importance of romping in parks and picnic spots, there is a world of difference between impact of unstructured play and outdoor education. The crucial difference being the learning outcomes that lie behind the structure of OE. It is more than a recreational experience. Which is why its essence can't be realized in a park or on a picnic.

A well-designed OE program, involves an organized experiencing of the outdoors through journey or residential experiences, with the intention of achieving certain objectives. Alongside the learning of hands-on outdoor skills, are exercises and experiences designed to strengthen life skills, improve self-confidence and responsibility, foster relationships and gain a more holistic view of not just the campsite, but of life itself. And it takes a very skilled educator to pull this through.

#### STEPPING OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

The 'comfort zone' is where we belong or rather choose to belong! It is where we are at ease and are used to the life we lead, the careers we've chosen, the people we like or dislike, what we choose to accept or reject. The comfort zone is where we feel a sense of security. This very comfort zone is





also where one tends to stagnate. It isn't the be all and end all. In order to grow and learn it's essential to go beyond the comfort zone, into the 'stretch zone'. Growth occurs when a person moves out of their area of comfort and into the unknown challenges of a fresh experience. A butterfly struggles out of the cocoon - the comfort zone; to stretch beyond it and fly free. The butterfly struggles in order to grow and achieve, the struggle being imperative. Like the butterfly, we too need to leave our comfort zone and overcome the challenges that lie beyond it.

It is normal to have fears and uncertainties upon leaving the comfort zone. The good news is that fear is in itself an indication of having left the comfort zone!! So, a picnic with the family that the child belongs to or playing in the park with friends he/she chooses, takes

place in the comfort zone of the child.

Outdoor experiential activities that are beyond their comfort zone, result in children finding themselves in the stretch zone, where they face challenges in an unfamiliar environment. It is dealing with the challenges, which the stretch zone offers that leads to learning - in the true sense of the word. The comfort zone is not bad at all; but in order to see 'beyond' and experience 'more' than what your child has been accustomed to - it's time to take that first step into the stretch zone!

**GROWTH OCCURS WHEN A PERSON MOVES OUT OF THEIR AREA OF COMFORT AND INTO THE UNKNOWN CHALLENGES OF A FRESH EXPERIENCE.**

#### OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN INDIA

There has been a big OE movement in the West quite some time ago. It has started finding its feet in India only in the last decade. Many reputed schools are trying to add OE to their curriculum framework with mixed





results. There is also a growing number of organisations that offer 'summer programmes' for children in metros.

When choosing an OE programme for your child it is essential to remember that there needs to be more in the offering than just a programme in the outdoors. Some programmes may be purely recreational in nature while others might be hard-core adventure focused. You should study their schedule and structure to see that the approach is balanced. Talking to the outdoor leaders who will be on the field, and with parents of previous participants might be a good idea.

The programme you choose ought to have an intentional, well planned approach in achieving learning objectives. The credibility of the organisation, and the outdoor leaders will make a world of a difference. Be sure to find out who your child is going to learn and be with! ■



## NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

Interacting with the natural world - walking on uneven surfaces, listening to blades of grass being rustled underfoot, identifying a bird in dense foliage, generally taking in an ever-changing environment - encourages children to sharpen all their senses.

It is hardly surprising that alienation from the natural world has proved to have devastating implications for the physical wellbeing, and long term mental and spiritual health of children. Journalist author Richard Louv calls this alienation from nature 'Nature Deficit Disorder.'

According to Louv this condition gives way to diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of emotional and physical illness. Some outward physiological symptoms of NDD include obesity, increased attention deficit disorder and decreased coordination. On the less obvious psychological side it can lead to depression and stifled creativity.

Studies have shown that reintroducing children to the outdoors can reverse these disorders. Not only is being in the outdoors pleasurable, it stimulates brain development and function with its richness and novelty. According to cognitive scientists Gleitman and Lieberman, cognition is rooted in perception. And the outdoors are a prime source of perceptions.





## BREAKING THE CAST

SURELY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION ISN'T SEPARATE FROM ALTERNATIVE LIVING SAYS KAUSHIK RAMU. A FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT OF HOW A FEW YEARS OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING CHANGED THE WAY HE LOOKED AT LIFE.

PHOTOGRAPHS: AVIK CHATTERJEE

We all have our share of moulting. But schools are special: every year of schooling is concomitant with some new stage of body and mind, some part in a play with a changing script and a whimsical lightsman. And schools, streets, parents, people, they work on us day and night, like tireless potters, deprecating one another, messing up for us what the caterpillar does so well. But one of my schools changed me very much: instead of trying to mould me, it broke the cast of my upbringing.

### LEARNING BY THE KILO

For much of my schooling, studying was by rote. Exams and homework were duties I was born into. One had to stand first in class. And when standing first was applauded, I began to chase it; it fed me. Wheeled by an ambitious mother and backed by an entire pantheon of gods bathed daily in milk, I was quite the model student. When I wasn't, there were scenes, and I was left with all the weight of what I'd done: fine, if I wanted to go astray and wash vessels, it was up to me. So I memorized my answers diligently. I got accustomed to children in white-and-blue uniforms pouring out, pil-



ing up and swarming in noisy eddies around me. There was an assortment of punishments for us - ranging from waist-pinching and good old wooden-scale-whacks on the palm to a sophisticated crouching position, the Hen, in which you gripped your ears from under your knees - all depending on what we did to get the teacher's goat - and sometimes just like that, in a meditative way, when the flies were annoying. The rare teacher might indeed have been dedicated, but there was no sense of doubt or discovery in class - there were just too many of us for that - and in the heat the fans hardly worked.

## STEPPING OUT

Most people in my family were engineers. And most people from my kind of family were either engineers or doctors. An uncle of mine once suggested to the family - when I was about eight and bouncing like a rubber ball - that I should become a doctor, "just to balance it".

My parents began to worry about my schooling. They wanted a respectable place, a boarding school that would teach me values as well as prepare me for entrance exams, that would build my character and personality and groom me into a smart achiever, into a smiling chap with good manners and gold medals and the willingness to show up in silky red *veshtis* when there were *pujas* at home.

My mother had misgivings about Krishnamurthi schools because - while they were known to be good, they were for the affluent, you know, boys from rich families, who knows what habits they have. For my father, they were too expensive. But they looked at each other and decided it was the right thing to do.

There's so much to learn, in choosing schools. If my parents had gone around my new school, wondering why there were no ranks, why there was a pottery shed, why there was no beating or disciplining, why children there didn't necessarily become engineers, it might have unsettled them wonderfully.

## STEPPING IN

When I arrived at The Valley School, I was out of place. I was embarrassed about my origins, my chequered Co-Optex bed sheet, my language and my bucket and everything else. I was besieged by American ways, I picked up a patchy accent in an hour, lied

about having gone abroad and learned to say 'oboy', 'yeah' and 'nope' before the sun set on the first day. I tucked my striped shirts out.

I caused a riot of giggle and guffaw when I stood at the door once with my hand stretched out and my "May I Come In?" pealed in the ears of the class. There were no rules, no uniforms. You didn't have to stand up while speaking; you didn't have to say 'sir'. Most teachers were 'uncle' and 'aunty' although a few had nicknames you could call them by, and you found yourself dining with them and playing cricket with them, even giving them the glare when your delivery missed their bat's edge.

The campus was green, and wild in places. There was music: sitar from the Art-room, flute from a window. I found etched terracotta on walls, and chunks of chiselled stone at my feet. In Art class, under a thatched roof, I painted two brown hills with a yellow sun rising between them, and it grew as I struggled to make it rounder. A boy beside me was sketching in quick, firm strokes, and what looked like blades of grass became three men poised on a floor, neither human nor of familiar shape, and it made me uneasy.

My struggle in this new society was to be something, to have an identity given that my previous one was shattered. What would people here approve of? Nobody seemed to care who came first, indeed there were no ranks - so what now? A lady teacher pointed out that I was so comfortable being alone, for a young boy - and I became devoutly comfortable being alone, I held it as my flag and my anthem for years.

I now see that first year as being about stepping over boundaries, clinging to what we know and yet letting go to project new images. It was also, in hindsight, a bend in a long struggle with sincerity.

## OPENING UP

I was preoccupied with the differences between the CBSE syllabus that I'd come from and the ICSE syllabus here. I'd never heard of Set Theory, for instance, but could quickly calculate missing angles and unspool the tables of savage numbers like 27. I now think this is an important, archetypal difference: the ability to connect and relate versus the ability to calculate and remember.

The school was removed from the



MY STRUGGLE IN THIS NEW SOCIETY WAS TO BE SOMETHING, TO HAVE AN IDENTITY GIVEN THAT MY PREVIOUS ONE WAS SHATTERED.



noxious fumes of Bangalore. The air was fresh; the grass was alive. You could do that wonderful, timeless thing: sit below a tree with a book. You could watch the lake's ripples, the ducks taking off and returning to squabble, and the villagers wrestling with their sheep at sheep-bath-time. There were no video-games cramping the mind with explosions, no TV shows feeding us instant gratification. You felt the seasons. The monkeys beat us to the fruit, stunning us with their leaps.

There were travellers who came and went: an Israeli architect who was obsessed with domes, and who held up an eggshell to explain how a dome can rest on nothing; a reticent French miniature-artist who travelled the world to display his work and sing with his guitar amongst strangers; a Malayali strummer-singer who sang about bananas, since, and he was quite convinced of this, everybody likes bananas, and this might unite the world some day. I don't know how they managed it! I wanted to travel too.

Our director sometimes spoke with us about mindsets, and conflict because of mindsets. There was a class on the contrived nature of likes and dislikes, where the teacher compared them to a game of tennis within the conditioned mind. We sometimes made fun of it all, and the teacher was easy to imitate ("Bayker heets from here to there, Leyndil heets from there to here" and so on). But some of these sessions returned to me many years after I left school; they stayed in the mind, like books in a musty attic where a man can read with wonder what he gathered by chance as a boy. In such classes, little windows opened to questions that didn't crystallize to an answer: like anger, death, attachment, right, wrong.

Much of my experience outside class brought my senses to life. Walking back from dinner to the boys' hostel meant going through the wet, dense vegetation at night, the strong perspirations of the earth, the restlessness of monkeys, with Physics and Hindi in one hand and a sputtering torch in the other. Nature comprised not just the dainty flowers; it was the stubbornness of hairy moths, the skins of snakes, the ribs of eaten rodents, the miracles of anthills and kitten-birth and trees felled by rainstorms, the sounds of wild boar in the bushes, the mosaic on the wings of dead butterflies fallen in our paths, the nervousness with which I kept looking back when I walked alone past what we called The Big Banyan Tree.

From the way teachers spoke of the wildlife around us - so casually, almost as if animals were neighbours and postmen - I grew into the assumption that it was all a part of our lives. I learned to admire the elegance of creatures and respect them for what they were. I remember a hot-headed young Indian cobra that, having occupied the path to the hostel, threatened everybody and swore in hisses when an audience gathered; and a senior student, the son of a German naturalist, coaxed it into looping around a long stick that he held - changing ends several times as the cobra drew towards his hand - and then slowly walked to a bush and released it. Nobody shrieked or threw stones or brought forth saucers of milk. And people carried on rather coolly: it was no great event, maybe worth a little dinner-talk but not a fright.

Had I studied these years in a concrete building with thirteen floors in the middle of Bombay, these things might have meant nothing to me: a tree might just have been a tree, as a box is just a box. And I saw that where I came from - where good boys studied hard and did their duties and prayed to god and god took care of the rest - so much was pushed under the carpet that the carpet was an undulating joke.

When I went home during breaks, I found the old order trivial and stultifying. There seemed to be so many assumptions in everything at home that conversation was difficult. My tendency to stand quietly on the balcony got everyone worried. My father, still anxious about the spending on my education, anxious that something should come out of it all, watched me closely, at the dining table, at doors, before guests.

Then, in school, there was all the difficulty of growing up: the groups of boys that formed, with all their codes of conduct, their walking styles and shibboleths, were in some ways a replacement for the strict, bored, waist-pinching teachers of earlier years. We were all terribly insecure: the boys among the boys, the girls among the girls. We were renegades with rule-books, bound by our fears.

But you could take a walk with a girl; no ayahs came looking for you with canes. And occasionally, in those conversations, one ceased to feel tested for virility, and one leaned back on rocks, biting blades of grass, watching the sky and speaking in low tones;



THERE WERE TRAVELLERS WHO  
CAME AND WENT: AN ISRAELI  
ARCHITECT WHO WAS OBSESSED  
WITH DOMES... A RETICENT  
FRENCH MINIATURE-ARTIST... A  
MALAYALI STRUMMER-SINGER WHO  
SANG ABOUT BANANAS...



## J. KRISHNAMURTHI ON SCHOOLS

A school is a place where one learns about the totality, the wholeness of life. Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the student explore, not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their own behaviour.



one became, occasionally, comfortable with the silence between people, with being free of all that insecurity. Learning wasn't linked to rewards and punishment. We ran the races on Sports Day with no prizes - we just ran; at least, it was intended that way by the school. Now there were indeed rivalries, and to the two fastest runners in my class - who couldn't stand each other - this race was about proving a point. But for others, it was fun to see how the body responded; it wasn't so bad not to win, not to pump your fist when someone else fell; there was a thrill in just being, in jumping through tyres and returning all muddy.

Many stayed away from the space the school was trying to create; I'm confused about why. It seemed to depend on the parents. If the parents themselves sought such spaces, children broke through the peer norms and found ways of expressing themselves with a freedom they wouldn't have found in a conventional school. But if parents, having paid the fees and signed the forms, left everything else to the school, with fixed ideas of what they expected, their children just shuffled around, chewing gum and looking bored, like toads in the sun, disgruntled prodigies whose place and time were anywhere but here and now. There were other parents who clearly said, pottery and holistic development were all very nice, but what about formulae and shortcuts? A question for a school to ask might be, 'What are the parents learning from their children's education?' If children are stifled at home and then sent for an alternative education, they grow - but like potted plants, like bushes clipped with heavy garden shears.

### IN RETROSPECT

Surely alternative education isn't separate from alternative living. I assume that parents who truly want a meaningful education for their children are aware of the vulgarity of life in a world driven by greed and envy, full of machines and gadgetry, with the cities hostile and congested, the air polluted, the water not fit to drink and the people lost without their chips and entertainment.

It's a long shot - a bit of an armchair dream - but if schools could teach you not just how to explore the world, but also how to live, and how to make a living, it might change our lives and make them richer. Now making a living is not the same as maximizing wealth - for the latter, a sequence of coaching classes, an IIT, an IIM and futures-trading on Wall Street will do - it is about that ingenuity which is in abundance in nature, to engage, adapt, improvise and survive.

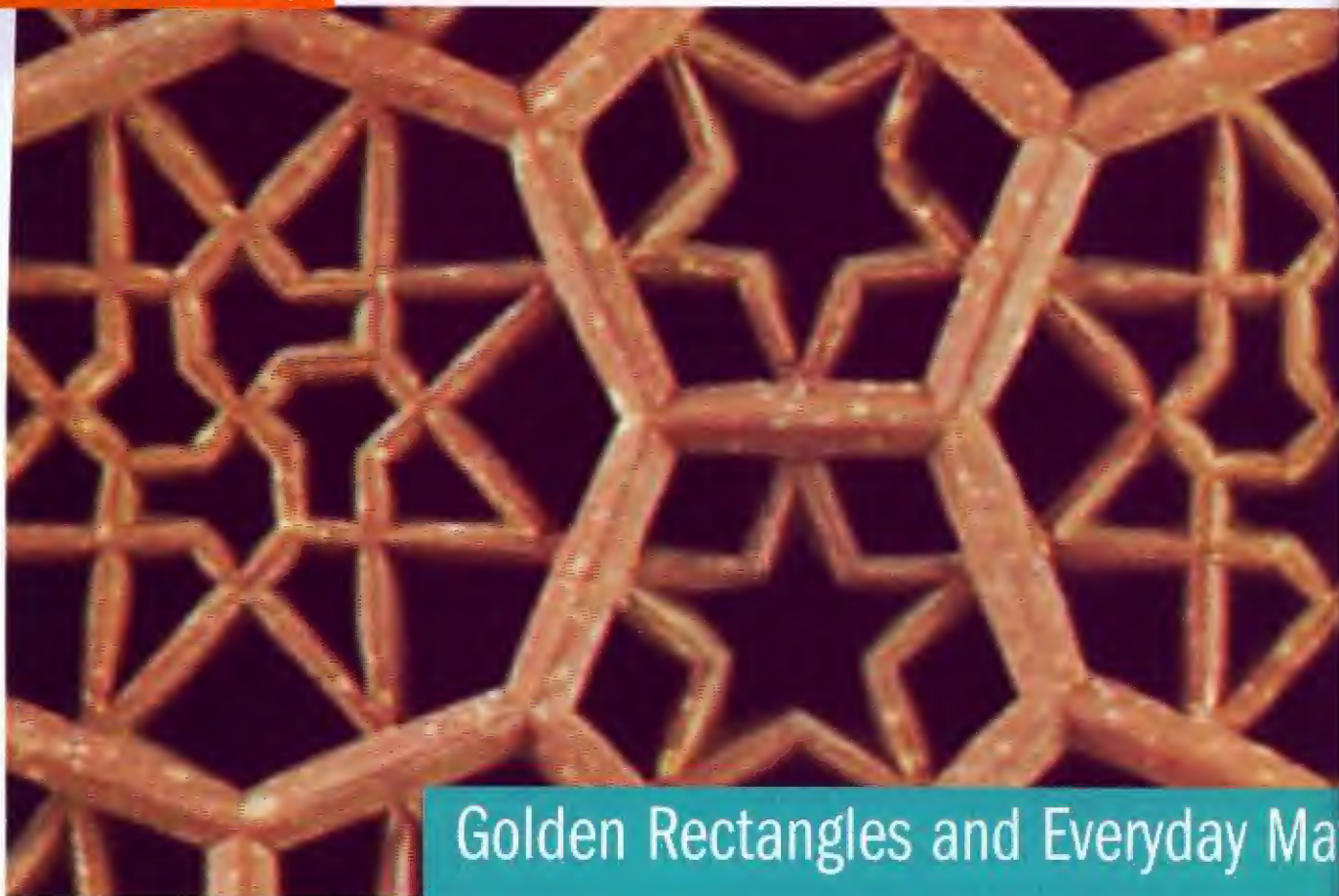
A friend of mine, a former chartered accountant, was walking in the street one day and suddenly realized he was meant to be a baby-photographer, not an auditor. He huffed and puffed - but managed to get going. It's a small-scale, personal job, with neither Sunday nor Monday, not a job in a large firm driven by metrics, but he's doing wonderfully. It would blend well with a lecture on ecological diversity, as an instance of local adaptation, as an argument against disruptive, large-scale projects. And perhaps a school could nurture such living.

In India, it might be easier than in the developed West to teach a way of life that is part of all the cycles of nature, in which you know what ginger and turmeric can do, how technology can work with natural cycles and not against them, why the topsoil and mangroves are precious to you, how to grow and build things, why a bottle of cola costs you much, much more than ten rupees.

There's the wonder of living, greater than all the percentiles on printed cards. Mathematics and physics are not just in dreary pages, but in the swinging of a cricket ball, in the steady logarithmic growth of a common snail's shell, in the design of the winged seeds of tropical lianas, that glide in windless air. There's history and Shakespeare in the epic struggles of plants- their greed, stratagems, agreements and treachery in trying to grow in cities, fields and crowded rainforests. There's percussion in poetry, music in whale songs, madness within the atom. There are profoundly troubling questions in physics, in my moving unchanged and forever if someone pushed me in space, in the idea of the Milky Way having an edge... My school was a good setting for making such connections, but I didn't look at what we studied deeply enough - maybe at thirteen, I moved away from conventional education too late. I am astonished whenever I discover an extraordinary experience now that I just moped past back then; things forced apart in textbooks are now lying spilled in my mind like paints on a floor, seeping into one another. ■

Kaustubh has an MBA from IIM Bangalore and a B.E from MIT, Mysore. He works as a technical analyst with a multinational in the IT sector, and teaches numbers for adult education projects. Among his interests are sustainable living, photography, text editors, ancient hand tools, walks in narrow streets and wine with tea (brewed, not bottled). He lives in Chennai and can be reached at kaustubh5@gmail.com





## Golden Rectangles and Everyday Ma

AS SOON AS CHILDREN START SCHOOL, MANY PARENTS, HAVING HANDED OVER THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING TO THE SCHOOL, LOSE TOUCH WITH IT THEMSELVES. AND SCHOOLS DON'T ALWAYS DO A GREAT JOB OF ENCOURAGING WONDER, OR HELPING A CHILD SOLVE REAL-LIFE PROBLEMS.

BY SHWETA ANAND ARORA

As adults negotiating life, parents are well placed to draw the connection between school and life, and bring alive boring textbooks and notes for their children. It's not important to be an expert on everything the child learns – what's important is to look out for real-world application of knowledge, share wonder with your child, and model strategies for structuring thinking, and finding out unknown information. This article is about what we can do to bring the oft-dreaded Math home.

### MATH IN ART

So what does Math have to do with snowflakes or paintings, or maps or architecture, or with history? What role does it play in our daily lives? As parents, we can play a huge role in helping our children see math in the world around us, and appreciating its usefulness, symmetry and order, rather than viewing it as something that is boring and straitjacketed, and is all about right and wrong.

One of the first things we need to do is to open our own minds about Math. Math is not just about fractions and calculus. It turns up in all kinds of unexpected places. Nature has shapes and patterns – circles, squares, triangles and spirals – appearing in



various forms and materials. (Think honeycombs and leaves, snails and seashells).

There exists a deep connection between art and geometry. Geometric patterns are the backbone of Islamic art (which frowns upon the representation of the human form); but they are also a vital part of art from other periods and places. Several works of art that are considered masterpieces draw their appeal from an elegance of proportion and composition from geometry.

Certain rectangles, known as 'golden rectangles', turn up often in obvious or hidden ways in these art pieces (see accompanying box). Geometric repeating patterns on tiles and mosaics and Escher's paintings are other places where Math turns up unexpectedly. Drawing children's (and our own) attention to these can help see Math in a very new and different light – as something that is connected to beauty and aesthetics, and not just to boring sums in textbooks.

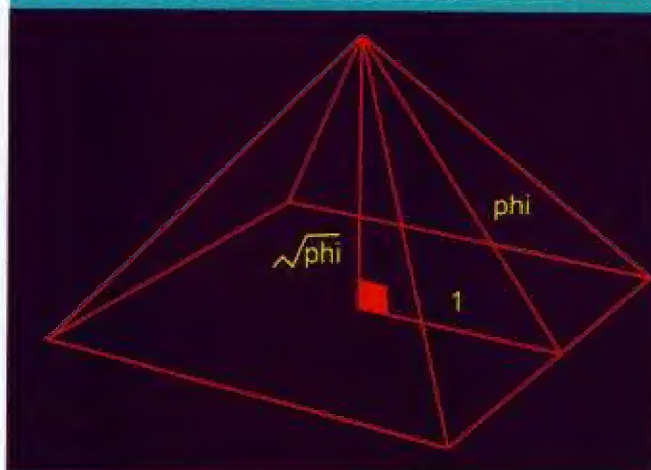
#### MATH IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Math is also extremely useful in our daily lives, and involving children in various projects can help them see the point of a lot of what they learn at school. Opportunities for these projects and activities exist everywhere – while shopping, planning holiday budgets, figuring out if we need a refuelling stop, following recipes, predicting India's chances of winning the cricket match that's going on, planning furniture for a room, or wrapping a present.

A friend of mine travels very frequently, and his family often gets free trips from the miles he earns. He asked his 7-year old son and 9-year old daughter to figure out which airline has the best frequent-flyer program so they can maximize these free trips. Taking into account the ratio of miles travelled to free miles earned, and then looking at how many free miles are needed to buy tickets on various sectors, the children came to the conclusion that their Dad should be travelling by Kingfisher to get the best deal!

Another group of slightly older children I know (11-12 year olds) are very interested in, and good at, art and craft. They got excited about starting a venture to sell their creations. One of their parents, an entrepreneur herself, decided to encourage them to take the idea forward. She taught them elementary accounts, and a few basic principles of business (pricing, elements of marketing, stocktaking). The children created some beautiful cards and stationery, wrote to several corporates a little before Diwali, and actually received and

#### GOLDEN RATIO AND GOLDEN RECTANGLE



The Golden Ratio – also known as the 'divine proportion' or 'golden mean' – is the ratio 1.61803399...:1 ( $\phi$ ). If you construct a rectangle with sides in this ratio, and divide it into a square and a smaller rectangle, the sides of the smaller rectangle will be in the same proportion as the original rectangle. Such a rectangle is called a Golden Rectangle. Both the Golden Ratio and the Golden Rectangle have been used in art and architecture across the ages.

Ancient Egyptians ascribed magical properties to this ratio, and used it in the design of their pyramids. If we take a cross-section of the Great Pyramid, we get a right triangle. The ratio of the slant height to the distance from ground centre is very close to the Golden Ratio.



Pythagoras, the Greek geometer, proved that the Golden Ratio is the basis for proportions of the human figure. This had a tremendous effect on Greek art and architecture, and a lot of their construction was based upon this proportion. The most famous of these buildings is the Parthenon.



delivered a sizable number of orders for Diwali cards and corporate gifts! Needless to say, their Math got sharpened, and they also developed several extremely useful business skills.

You can build many such projects for your children, to get them really excited about and comfortable with using Math. Keep some of the following pointers in mind while creating these ideas:

#### KEEP IT REAL, AND DON'T OVERSIMPLIFY

Look for real problems that require solving, don't make this one more extension of homework! Asking children to come up with a menu, and then give you a shopping list for ingredients with quantities is an example of the former, giving a problem like 'I use 2 bottles of milk every day, how many should I buy for a week?' is an example of the latter.

#### FIND CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER THINGS YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING

An example of this could be studying Egyptian pyramids, and then constructing our own. Figuring out how to construct a pyramid of a given height could pose a higher-level challenge.

#### BUILD ON YOUR CHILD'S INTERESTS

If your child is a sports freak, sportsmen's statistics are a good place to start; for a child who loves building things, figuring out how much wood to buy and then making a piece of furniture could be far more fun; for someone who loves art, looking for symmetry or 'golden rectangles' in paintings can be fascinating.

The idea is to think through problems together, to model your own thinking process for your child, and help her develop an ability to structure real-life problems, understand that the same problem can be solved in different ways, and most importantly, begin to appreciate and enjoy Math! ■

Shweta is a psychologist turned management consultant turned educator who wishes she could go back to school, now that schools are finally beginning to get interesting! She loves looking at interiors magazines, is addicted to children's books, and wishes she'd met Enid Blyton. You can write to Shweta at [shweta@discoveri.com](mailto:shweta@discoveri.com).



### MATH GAMES FOR EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

#### DHOBİ MATH

Calculate how much you need to pay the dhobi - even more fun if he charges different amounts for different kinds of clothes!

#### DIVIDING FAMILY MATH

Investigate how to divide a pizza equally, and explain the logic to siblings and friends.

#### STOCK MARKET MATH

Keep an imaginary portfolio in the stock market, and track its movements.

#### ARRIVING ON TIME MATH

Calculate and record the average speed one can travel at in the city (record the distance travelled using your car's meter, note the time taken for a few trips to get to an average). Before travelling, look

up a map, estimate the distance, and the time you will need to get there, and therefore the time that you should leave home. The analysis can take time-of-day into account (average speed is lower at rush hour).

#### TRAFFIC JAM MATH

Count cars while stuck in a traffic jam. Or, estimate the number of cars stuck in the jam.

#### SALE MATH

Calculate how much money you saved by shopping at a sale.

#### RECIPE MATH

Calculate and measure out ingredients for a recipe you're cooking for a number that's different from the one specified in the recipe.





## 7 THINGS TO DO IN GOA

MOST HOLIDAYS CONSIST OF THINGS THAT YOU WANT TO DO, AND THINGS THAT YOUR CHILDREN WANT TO DO, AND A GREAT TUG OF WAR BETWEEN THE TWO SINCE THERE IS LITTLE COMMON GROUND. WHICH IS UNFORTUNATE, CONSIDERING THAT HOLIDAYS MARK THE PERFECT TIME TO EXPERIENCE THINGS TOGETHER. MINDFIELDS BRINGS YOU A SECTION ON TRAVELING WITH YOUR CHILD. WE RECOMMEND DOING ALL THESE THINGS TOGETHER!

### 1 HIDDEN GEMS OF OLD GOA BICYCLE TOUR

**What:** Bicycling tour of the Portuguese quarter of Old Goa, including World Heritage sites as well as some oft-neglected monuments.

**Why:** Unique, hands-on way to experience a place and its history.

**Age Group:** 10 years and above

**Equipment:** Geared bicycles, helmets, trained guide and MP3 player with headsets and commentary

**How much:** Rs 1500 per head (group discounts available)

**Contact:** Godfrey Gomes (0832) 3252854

Finally, a chance to explore Goa in the most obvious way – unrushed, and on a bicycle. In a large group, or as a quieter parent-child unit, cycle on the roads of Old Goa. Once the capital of the Portuguese empire in India, much of Old Goa has disappeared or is in ruins, but the commentary on the MP3 player recreates its glory days.



The archiving of history has seldom tried to appeal to the imagination of the young in India. **The Hidden Gems of Old Goa** tour attempts to drive away the droning tone of history and replace it with the exciting sound of wind in your ears. One wishes more cultural destinations would follow suit.

The organizers recommend making an early morning start for the tour. The bicycles available are lightweight, imported geared models with adjustable seats; helmets are a must; and there is a watchful guide who cycles with you. Pack a knapsack with a sandwich, water bottle, sun block, and enjoy the ride through one of the most beautifully preserved historical cities in India. Essential for parents and children who slept through history class. ■

#### ROUTE

■ START AT THE PARK INN HOTEL (OLD GOA) ■ CHAPEL OF ST CATHERINE ■ THE PIER ■ VICEROY'S ARCH ■ ADIL SHAH'S GATE ■ ARCH OF CONCEPTION ■ CHAPEL OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT ■ OLD COLLEGE OF ST PAUL ■ CHAPEL OF SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER ■ THE PILLORY ■ THE MUSEUM OF CHRISTIAN ART ■ CHAPEL OF THE WEeping CROSS ■ CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF ROSARY ■ FINISH AT THE PARK INN HOTEL



## 2

### UNDERWATER EXPLORATION

**What:** Intro to the underwater world.

**Why:** Introduction to the world of scuba diving. Explore weightlessness.

**Requirement:** Swimmers only!

**Age Group:** 11 years and above

**How much:** Bubblemakers: Rs 500 (20 minute swimming pool session).

Openwater Diver PADI certification: price on request

**Contact:** Ajey on 093250 30109 or email [get.ajey@gmail.com](mailto:get.ajey@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.divegoa.com](http://www.divegoa.com)

The joys of scuba diving are immense. Unlike snorkeling, where you bob on the surface of water, when you dive, you interact with the realm as if you belonged in it. You can experience weightlessness, you can breathe as though you were on land, except that you have a sky of

water above head. Not to mention the itinerant sweetlips or bannerfish.

Divegoa offers you Bubblemakers, a basic introduction to scuba diving through swimming pool sessions with a certified PADI instructor. For Rs 500 (cheap!), get acquainted with scuba gear, learn to rig up your tank and buoyancy control device, clean and wear your mask, breathe with the mouthpiece, recognize and respond to divers' sign language, control your buoyancy, sit and swim underwater, and carry out basic diving drill. This could be a perfect first step towards the 4-day PADI Openwater certification, which is also offered by Divegoa. ■





### 3 BOOKSHOP IN A GOAN VILLA: LITERATI

**What:** Bookstore with Cafe

**Why:** Leisurely browsing, comfortable sofas, in-house café

**Timings:** Open all days except Wednesday 10 am - 7 pm

**Age Group:** 10 years and above

**Contact:** Diviya Kapur (0832) 22 777 40

E/1-282 Gaura Vaddo, Calangute, Bardez, Goa (lane opposite Tarcar Ice Factory)

**Website:** [www.literati-goia.com](http://www.literati-goia.com) (Look up for upcoming events)

Diviya Kapur moved from Delhi to Goa and from a legal career to one that revolves around bibliophiles. An idea that was harbored for over ten years has come to fruition last year, and Literati has set up bookshop and café in a beautiful hundred-year old Goan villa. In a time when most bookstores feel the need to double up as stationary, knickknack and CD stores to capture the attention of people, there is something wholesome and quaint about Literati.

Leisurely and decidedly un-shop, there are two rooms full of used books and a larger room with new titles, including a section for children and young adults. The collection is small but eclectic, and Literati takes book orders (a sigh of relief for those who live in Goa or are on an extended vacation).

Several deep cushioned sofas in all three rooms invite you to sit down and read. For as long as you please. A little like rummaging the shelves of some literary granduncle's home, except that you get to take home what you please. The used books are reasonably priced between Rs 50 - Rs 150.

Literati is an ideal space to talk about books, enjoy the light, read, and introduce your youngster to the pleasures of the written word. It is also emerging as something of a hub for the well. Literati, with a steady book club, readings, workshops on storytelling, origami and craft. ■

### 4 3 D FILMS AT THE SCIENCE CENTRE



**What:** 3D film on Nature and Marine Life

**Where:** Goa Science Center, Marine highway, Miramar, Panjim

**Ticket:** Adults: Rs 10/- Students Rs 5/-

**Timings:** 5 times a day 1100/1230/1400/1530/1700hrs

Open all days except Holi and Diwali

**Age Group:** 7 years and above

**Telephone:** (0832) 2463426

**Website:** [www.goasciencecentre.org](http://www.goasciencecentre.org)

The 30 minute show has three films: Shark island, Funny animals and Master of Magic. Interesting experience for younger children. When we saw it, the sound quality was less than perfect (though the theatre was air conditioned and new) but we were reassured that the projectionist was a novice and that the sound is actually good. ■





5

## DIORAMA OF GOA: ANCESTRAL GOA

**What:** Model-village that depicts Goan life as it was 200 years ago.

**Why:** Dioramas make history easy to imagine.

**Ticket:** Rs 20 - Children below ten years: Rs. 10

**Age Group:** 7 years and above

**Contact:** Maendra Alvares

**Telephone:** (0832) 2777034, 2750430

**Website:** [www.ancestralgoa.com](http://www.ancestralgoa.com)

Ancestral Goa is the brainchild of Maendra Alvares, sculptor and culture aficionado. Nestled in the greenery and quiet of Loutolim in South Goa is a vintage reproduction of what life in Goa must have been like two hundred years ago. Something like what Dakshinchitra (near Chennai) has done for South Indian heritage houses, the dioramas make history easy to imagine, and it is a great way to observe how people in the past lived in such complete harmony with their natural surroundings.

Walk around to see the abodes of Victorin the fisherman, Caetano the coconut husker, Joao the farmer,

Andu the potter, Daku the cobbler, Anmare the basket weaver, Inas the Carpenter, Dona Maria and Anand Lotlikar - the wealthier residents; and a host of village institutions including the village marketplace or *tinto*, music school and taverna. All in the kind of apparel and the kind of spaces that people must have existed in Goa two hundred years ago. There is, too, a Herb Garden and a Handicraft Centre with an array of locally made artifacts.

Ancestral Goa organizes a 2-3 day Childrens Camp every May where the activities range from making earth color dyes, to learning how to roast cashewnuts, making sand sculpture, and fishing. If you happen to be visiting during that time of the year, be sure to call in for details. A visit to Ancestral Goa is a perfect half-day trip. You could wrap it up with a Goan lunch at Nostalgia, two kilometers away. ■

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## BABY'S DAY OUT: BABA SHACK



**What:** A shack for 2-6 year olds and their parents. With toilet, high chairs, a sleeping area (with mattress and mosquito net), child-friendly menu, toys and games, TV with children's channels, and even a birthday party facility on Sundays.

**Where:** Calangute Beach (10 shacks down the left of Souza Lobo's)

**How much:** Rs 100 per hour

**Timings:** 10 am - 6 pm (Monday to Saturday)

**Contact:** Luisa Mistry on 09860366514

After a few days of chasing crabs, building sand castles and playing tag with the waves, the beach can be stressful for a young child. The sun can get intense, the sand gets in the food, and baby doesn't want to pee open-air. The newly opened Baba Shack hopes to solve these dilemmas, offering child-centered conveniences. Ideal for a quick recuperation before you get back to the business of doggy-paddling and sand castle-building again. ■





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## SPICE PLANTATION: SAVOI VEREM

**What:** Spice plantation and restaurant serving authentic Goan Saraswat food.

**Why:** Guided tour through the spice plantation.

**Meal for 4:** Rs 1500

**Contact:** Savoi Plantation, Savoi Verem, 10 kms from Ponda  
Tel: (0832) 2340272

**Website:** [www.savoiplantations.com](http://www.savoiplantations.com)

Just a visit to Savoi Verem village is a break from the beach resort Goa that monopolizes the media and public imagination. This is heartland Goa, and Savoi Plantation is a cleverly thought out, immaculately managed idea that preserves tradition even as it draws those who seek the 'authentic' Goa.

Savoi Plantation, owned and run by the Shetye family, is a 200 year-old estate that offers you a chance to wander

amongst its herb and spice gardens, and partake of food from a Saraswat Goan Hindu kitchen. In fact, the walk around the plantation is as important as the lunch that follows. It isn't often that children from cities see vanilla or coffee beans in their natural environment, or for that matter, rotund jackfruits, ginger, or bead necklace-like peppercorns. Swinging on banyan tree roots is an added plus.

Shalan Shetye is the smiling matriarch who runs the kitchen and blends the masalas for the meal. Lunch, served in earthenware pots and plantain leaves on a rough-hewn wooden table is as much of a visual treat as it is, a culinary delight! You won't find this fare on the ubiquitous shack menus at Baga or Colva. ■



### FOOD YOU SHOULDN'T MISS

**Snacks:** Jackfruit and Breadfruit chips, Roasted Cashews

**Vegetarian:** Jackfruit Vegetable, Banana Flower Vegetable, Papaya Vegetable, Solkadi (made from *kokum*)

**Non Vegetarian:** Kismoor (dry fish cooked in coconut), Prawns Curry, Chicken Xacuti, Fried Fish, Fried Prawns, Shell Fish

**Sweet dishes:** Jackfruit cake, Cucumber cake, Millet seeds *sattu*  
*Try the local boiled brown rice with your curry.*



# THE ISLE OF BLOG



BLOGS HAVE BEEN USED TO DRUM UP PUBLIC OPINIONS ON UNPOPULAR PUBLIC POLICIES, ROCKSTARS, POLITICIANS AND INTELLECTUALS HAVE USED IT TO SPREAD THEIR BRANDS OF WISDOM.

BY MINDFIELDS TEAM

A blog is a website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in reverse chronological order. While most blogs are primarily textual, others focus on photographs, video or audio - and go by the names photoblog, vlog and podcast.

In the past the Internet served very much like mass media - with an amount of investment required if you wanted to publish anything of consequence in it. In its second avatar there is a revolution at hand. It requires nothing to register and start posting blogs. How does it benefit the website providing the space and technology that probably cost them thousands of dollars? Well they have their own plans. Meanwhile, the people can blog away for free.

All you need to do is log in to one of the blog websites ([www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com), [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com) - are amongst the more popular) and register yourself just as you would for a free email id. The difference between an email id and a blog id is that we use emails to send email messages to specific people. In a blog you leave your messages on a message board that anyone can access on the Internet - just like websites.

A blog is a website like any other where one can do pretty much as one pleases. From recipes to personal anecdotes to how angry you are with your local government or your dog's walker.

Blogs have been used to drum up public opinions on unpopular public policies, rockstars, politicians and intellectuals have used it to spread their brands of wisdom.

Basically it is anything you want it to be. It's your plot. Build your own house - Punjabi Baroque, Gujarati Gothic, Hyderabad Tudor or Maratha Nippon. So, once you have your house ready - with your view and ideas of what you want to air/post, you, depending on what you want to achieve, would like some people to come into your house and figure. And they leave behind messages to your posts. Therefore enabling something much larger - a kind of social networking of sorts -



## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BLOG

- THE TERM 'WEBLOG' WAS COINED BY JORRY BARGER ON 17 DECEMBER 1997. THE TERM 'BLOG' WAS COINED BY PETER MERHOLZ IN HIS BLOG PETERME.COM IN APRIL/MAY 1999.
- OPEN DIARY, LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER 1998, INNOVATED THE READER COMMENT, BECOMING THE FIRST BLOG COMMUNITY WHERE READERS COULD ADD COMMENTS TO OTHER WRITERS' BLOG ENTRIES.
- BRAD FITZPATRICK STARTED LIVEJOURNAL IN MARCH 1999. EVAN WILLIAMS AND MEG HOURIHAN OF PYRA LABS LAUNCHED BLOGGER.COM IN AUGUST 1999 (BOUGHT BY GOOGLE IN FEBRUARY 2003).
- BY 2001, BLOGGING WAS ENOUGH OF A PHENOMENON THAT HOW-TO MANUALS ON TECHNIQUE BEGAN TO APPEAR. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BLOGGING COMMUNITY (AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO LARGER SOCIETY) INCREASED RAPIDLY.
- SCHOOLS OF JOURNALISM BEGAN RESEARCHING BLOGGING AND NOTING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND BLOGGING.
- BLOGGING BY ESTABLISHED POLITICIANS AND EXPERTS TO EXPRESS OPINIONS ON WAR AND OTHER ISSUES, CEMENTED BLOGS' ROLE AS A SOURCE OF NEWS AND IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS.
- SINCE 2002, BLOGS HAVE GAINED INCREASING NOTICE FOR THEIR ROLE IN BREAKING, SHAPING, AND SPINNING NEWS STORIES. THE SECOND IRAQ WAR SAW BLOGGERS TAKING POINTS OF VIEW THAT WENT BEYOND THE LEFT-RIGHT DIVIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. IRAQI BLOGGERS GAINED WIDE READERSHIP, AND BLOGS WERE ALSO CREATED BY SOLDIERS SERVING IN THE WAR. SUCH 'WARBLOGS' GAVE READERS NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE REALITIES OF WAR, AS WELL AS OFFERING VIEWPOINTS DIFFERENT FROM OFFICIAL NEWS SOURCES.
- BLOGGING WAS USED TO DRAW ATTENTION TO OBSCURE NEWS SOURCES. FOR EXAMPLE, BLOGGERS POSTED LINKS TO TRAFFIC CAMERAS IN MADRID AS A HUGE ANTI-TERRORISM DEMONSTRATION FILLED THE STREETS IN THE WAKE OF THE MARCH 11 ATTACKS.
- BLOGGERS BEGAN TO PROVIDE NEARLY INSTANT COMMENTARY ON TELEVISED EVENTS, CREATING A SECONDARY MEANING OF THE WORD 'BLOGGING': TO SIMULTANEOUSLY TRANSCRIBE AND EDITORIALIZE SPEECHES AND EVENTS SHOWN ON TELEVISION.

place where one can exchange ideas and information.

Governments control mass media sometimes directly and sometimes invisibly – but always. And by mass media we mean TV, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines – the mediums of information and information exchange for the common man/woman. Basically through a lot of controls – the government can pressurize media companies to air or not air policies and ideas they think unsuitable or not yet ready for mass consumption- justified or not,

With the Internet and especially blogs we have found a way of circumventing this control point. Most governments are well meaning but apathetic and most of the media will only make available what makes money for them. And then there are resources that genuinely help people but access is a problem. Resulting in a lot of relevant information not being available to people who need it most.

All that now is a thing of the past. Someone in Leh, Ladakh could have an idea and post it online and someone in Perth, Australia could access that. Search engines are also

being refined in such a manner that it pulls up relevant blogs to searches. Allowing for a community of like-minded people coming and putting their resources/ideas together. At the least people can go figure what's happening around the world. ■

### BLOGS OF NOTE:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| ■ PHOTO<br><a href="http://www.topleftpixel.com">http://www.topleftpixel.com</a>       | ■ MEDICINE<br><a href="http://www.docnotes.net">www.docnotes.net</a>                   |
| ■ TRAVEL<br><a href="http://www.vagabonding.com">www.vagabonding.com</a>               | ■ TECHNOLOGY<br><a href="http://www.techdirt.com">www.techdirt.com</a>                 |
| ■ FOOD<br><a href="http://cookingwithamy.blogspot.com">cookingwithamy.blogspot.com</a> | ■ WAR BLOG<br><a href="http://www.dailykos.com">www.dailykos.com</a>                   |
| ■ FILM<br><a href="http://www.filmfodder.com">www.filmfodder.com</a>                   | ■ AUTHOR<br><a href="http://www.neilgaiman.com/journal">www.neilgaiman.com/journal</a> |



# LIZA CHOWGULE'S classroom under the sky

LIZA CHOWGULE RUNS THE ITTC SCHOOL IN VASCO DA GAMA, GOA. BASED ON THE WALDORF METHOD, THE SCHOOL HAS GROWN TO BE A FORCE TO RECKON WITH OVER THE LAST FOURTEEN YEARS.

ILLUSTRATION: AMRUTA PATIL  
PHOTOS: LUKE HACKIP

## STARTING AT THE BEGINNING, WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND BEEN LIKE?

My family was in Africa for the longest time. I've studied in a British primary school, then at the Presentation Convent in Kodaikanal, which was a traditional school, but untraditional in that we had a lot of say in what we wanted to learn and what we didn't – unusual for most schools even now.

After that, I studied Psychology at Sophia Polytechnic in Mumbai, attended a teacher training program. Then taught, first at Bangalore's Baldwin school (traumatizing) and The Valley school (good), followed by three years of studying the Waldorf Method in the UK.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO OPEN A SCHOOL IN VASCO?

I always knew I wanted to do something on these lines. I moved to Goa after marrying Umaji Chowgule. His family manages an SSC board school, I worked with them for a while before starting a school of my own.

In Vasco, I have this image of being the strange person who does strange things. The perception is changing a little now after fourteen years now. The school has never had to do anything to advertise itself. People come... and they seem to stay.







**HAS THERE BEEN A MARKED DIFFERENCE IN THE PROFILE OF STUDENTS FROM THE INCEPTION OF THE SCHOOL UNTIL NOW?**

There was a perception of the school being an elitist school, but it isn't true. Students pay what they can. It certainly does not make it easy for us as administrators, but we believe no one must be kept away from our school on the basis of not being able to pay the fee. No one should be denied an education.

**WHAT KIND OF CURRICULUM DO YOU FOLLOW?**

We follow the Waldorf curriculum - which is more of a philosophy than a blueprint that instructs you what to do (*see table*). It adapts well with any sort of environment.

Most of the learning takes, say, a major festival (of any of the religions represented in our students) as a point of departure - and then uses various aspects of that as a way of learning things related to different subjects. For example, when learning about kite flying, students will learn about angles and the construction of kites, as well as the history behind them. All learning relates to life.

**ARE THERE ANY PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS TO THIS IDEA?**

It causes problems sometimes. Especially in higher grades when students' parents expect them to mingle back into the mainstream, answer formulaic exams - which are all about answering things in a specific way in one hour flat. How does one connect this process with what we teach our students... about all learning relating to life? It is a difficult question.

And the only answer I manage is that "this is the best we can manage given the circumstances we are in."

**IN THE WALDORF METHOD, THE SAME TEACHER TEACHES A CLASS FROM GRADES 1 THROUGH 7. HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH AREAS THAT THE TEACHER HAS SOME DISCOMFORT WITH?**

The main subjects where we see this discomfort arise are Language and Mathematics. Typically, teachers swap for just those segments. When a teacher has completed her seven years with one grade, she takes a sabbatical during which she is expected to hone her skills in the area.

Some problems are typical to India because unlike in most Waldorf schools, teachers and students do not have a dialogue and instruction in their mother tongue.

**EVEN WELL-INTENTIONED ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS IN METROS RUN INTO A GREAT PAUCITY WHEN IT COMES TO TEACHERS. HOW DO YOU MANAGE IN A SMALL TOWN?**

We train teachers here. They spend three or four weeks observing our strongest teachers conduct a class. Then they take a test class of their own and I observe how they do that.

It's obvious in the very first meeting - whether someone is appropriate for the job or not. It's really got nothing to do with the qualifications. You can tell from the way a person interacts with children - whether they treat them like a sea of people, or like individuals. In fact, the less qualified a teacher, the less she needs to unlearn before fitting in here.

Mainstream teachers have it harder, though we do have one or two who have transitioned to this system beautifully.

**WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ATTRITION RATE OF TEACHERS?**

Many of our teachers have been wives of Navy officers (there is a large Naval Base in Vasco) with transferable jobs. By the time they get a hang of things, it is time for them to move cities. So long as a teacher takes her training to some school, she is making use of it, and children are going to benefit from it.

Teachers who have worked here in the past call and say, "We can't find a school like this." My answer to them is "Don't try to. Change the environment *wherever* you happen to be." An interesting thing is that the attrition rarely has anything to do with salaries. I wish we could afford to pay our teachers more than we do - they really deserve it.

**THERE ARE DEFINITE PLUSES ABOUT BEING IN GOA. UNTAINTED NATURAL SURROUNDINGS, FOR ONE, BUT ONE OF THE THINGS WE DO MISS HERE ARE THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND MUSEUM RESOURCES. HOW DOES A SCHOOL LIKE YOURS COMPENSATE FOR THAT?**

I don't think we are managing to compensate quite enough. We try to do what we can - bring in guest lecturers from the fields of music or art. But the need for libraries and exhibitions remains.

Some years back, we tried to put together some sort of a mobile library, but the plan fell through. Ideally, I would like the mobile resource to be something that many schools in the area could utilize, not just our school. I don't want it to be just for us.



**"THE RESULTS OF A LEARNING PROCESS SUCH AS THIS ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY TANGIBLE AND MEASURABLE. YOU NEED TO BE PATIENT, WAIT FOR YEARS TO SEE HOW THINGS HAVE WORKED OUT."**





WOODWORKING AREA FOR STUDENTS OF THE ITTO SCHOOL

## WHAT MAKES THE WALDORF METHOD UNIQUE?

The emphasis is not so much on the subjects taught as on when and how these subjects are introduced. Based on Rudolf Steiner's idea that specific forces and capabilities unfold within a child in distinct seven-year cycles, the Waldorf model is designed to provide the right thing at the right time. The method does not impose content that a child is not ready to embrace. Rather, Waldorf education is designed to awaken the capacities within a child.

### THE WALDORF APPROACH TO CURRICULUM

- The "head, heart, and hands" approach is vital to the curriculum. Many things considered "extracurricular" in mainstream education are considered paramount to Waldorf education, including gardening, woodworking, painting, farming and house-building.
- There is a deep connection with the oral tradition, beginning with fairy tales. The oral approach is used throughout the entire curriculum. The mastery of oral communication is seen as integral to all learning that takes place.
- The use of electronic media (television, videos, video games, computers) by children at an early age is discouraged. Rather, the use of a computer as a tool (as opposed to an instrument used for entertainment purposes) is introduced to children once skills in literacy are more deeply developed.
- Main subjects, including history, language arts, science and mathematics are taught within the context of a Main Lesson block. In a Waldorf school, these blocks typically consist of up to 2 hours per day in a particular subject, with each block lasting 3 or 4 weeks in length. The Main Lesson model offers an opportunity for focus and in-depth study rather than jumping from one subject to another too quickly.
- Traditional textbooks are not generally used in Waldorf schools, especially in the early grades. Rather, children create their own Main Lesson books, which contain a record of the child's best work that is accomplished over the course of the year.
- Waldorf education can be likened to that of an ascending spiral. One continues to revisit subjects time and time again, deepening them and gaining new insights with each exposure.
- There is an emphasis on festivals, or spiritual turning points in the year, as they serve to connect humanity with the rhythms of nature and of the cosmos.

IT MUST BE TRICKY TO HAVE SOMETHING SO THOUGHTFUL HAPPENING IN CLASS WITH NO SCAFFOLDING FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AT HOME, WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE CONCEPTUAL LEARNING PROCESS?

This is delicate ground to tread. In terms of the actual conceptual learning itself, we do not place demands - whether in terms of projects or even homework - which the children cannot carry out without parental supervision. There might be the occasional survey, or activity that children do with their parents - like they taught their parents a recipe as one of their home assignments. Parents stepping into the actual learning process can be counterproductive.

MAYBE ONE OF THE WAYS PARENTS COULD CONTRIBUTE IS BY UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING THE METHODOLOGY OF THE SCHOOL...

Yes. The results of a learning process such as this are not immediately tangible and measurable. You need to be patient, wait for years to see how things have worked out. And this is easier for parents who have had a non-traditional education themselves. For others, it is a leap of faith. It can be (and has been) very hard for some of them.

YOU MENTIONED THAT THE WALDORF METHOD IS ABOUT THE PROCESS, NOT ABOUT THE RESULT...

That is its biggest strength, and it is also its weakness. We need to constantly watch out for the trap of making creative

beginnings and pathways that never lead into any conclusive results.

HOW DO CHILDREN WHO JOIN THE SCHOOL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PROGRAM COPE?

The drawback of mainstream schools is that they teach so many children at once that the children almost never learn to think for themselves. They don't learn how to analyze, enquire, research or question. And that is the backbone of our learning methodology. Children from mainstream schools, especially if they join in middle school or later, need to adjust a great deal to this.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN. HOW DO THEY COPE WHILE BEING AROUND STUDENTS FROM ANY OTHER SCHOOL...

Our children are a lot less reserved than most... and they are almost gentle to fault. They get along fine with younger children, say, street kids from an organization we work with. It's kids their own age group that can be a challenge.

SO THERE IS NO INTERACTION WITH THE REST OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY IN VASCO?

We have tried to invite students over. Other schools like us to host competitions for which they can send their school children over to participate... I'm not very excited about



these sort of competitions. Otherwise there is the usual excuse about the time table being so packed that there is no time for yet another 'event' to attend.

One of the most exciting exchanges we have managed is the annual football matches. We meet other schools, or anyone in town who would like to play a football match, and we mix the people up into two teams. So there is no pre-decided 'us' versus 'them'. The teams consist of boys *and* girls.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES YOU FACE?

All kinds. Investigations about whether we are breaking any rules by the way we ran our school - this is true. They were willing to thumb through the entire rulebook to find out one that we have flouted! Then there is the constant struggle to get permissions for land. I have to say that the Chowgule name makes administrative potholes a little easi-



er to ride over. Right now the school is operating in various independent bungalows that have been rented. I am waiting to have a unified campus for the school.

#### YOUR CLASSROOMS HAVE THE USUAL DESK AND CHAIRS FOR THE CHILDREN. WHY?

It makes for greater flexibility in the classroom to have low, wide tables that can be used as tables, stools, or be joined up to make a stage. When they need open floor space in class, they just stack the tables up. The other thing is that I personally believe it is good to sit on the floor... keeps you centered with the earth.

#### WE NOTICE THAT THE COOKIE JARS ON THE COUNTER ARE FULL. AND THE COOKIES ARE EXCELLENT...

We give a lot of emphasis to food here. The *making* of it, not just the eating. Anytime there is a birthday in class, classmates bake or cook for the entire school, which is a lot of cooking.

#### FIELD TRIPS?

Project-based learning keeps them on the field a lot. There are the usual local trips to Old Goa (for architecture), organic farms etc. But they also make trips out of town every year to visit a place that is connected with whatever they were studying. And so, in the past, groups have gone to Mumbai to study the planetarium, Kabini to study the wildlife and Tamil Nadu for its spice gardens.

#### IN A SCHOOL WHERE ALL LEARNING SEEMS TO BE CONNECTED WITH HAVING FUN, ITS ODD TO ASK ABOUT EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES...

One thing that needs mention is the theatre production we did two years back. It was an adaptation of Shakespearean plays and was called 'As We Like It'. It took two years to prepare, with large-scale sets, costumes, the works. We set up a whole façade of a Victorian house in front of which the children performed. It was beautiful. And it was open to public.

#### YOUR FIRST TWELFTH GRADE STUDENT PASSED FROM THE SCHOOL LAST YEAR AND HAS JOINED ST. XAVIERS COLLEGE, MUMBAI. IS THAT A SIGN OF RELIEF FOR THE MANY PEOPLE WHO WONDER ABOUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENS TO CHILDREN WHO GO TO NON-CONVENTIONAL SCHOOLS?

Yes and no. We know that with the kind of grounding these children have, they will be at an advantage in life. But that does not translate into high percentages and school leaving certificates and grades and the other things that are also part and parcel of the system. What most Waldorf schools do is equip you with a portfolio of work that you can present to universities and be gauged on the basis of. That, obviously, is not an option here. So we have had to compromise a little bit and introduce Cambridge A Levels here from grade nine onwards.

There are some glaring loopholes in the further education system. Medical schools have an independent common entrance exam, but you are only eligible to sit for one if you have a school-leaving certificate!

So, realistically, there are some courses and places where a student from our school would fare better than in others (the fine and liberal arts and media, for example). If you ask me, I wouldn't have my son (in grade 11 of the ITTC school) answer any final exam for grade 12, but he insists on doing that, because he would like to undergo a different experience. Exams are a novelty for him! ■



# ARTISTS FOR BRIGHT SPACES

A MURAL BECOMES A HEARTWARMING COLLABORATION BETWEEN ELEVEN INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS AND THE CHILDREN OF AKSHAY PRATISHTHAN.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT: MARIA RAPONI

As a part of an artist residency in New Delhi for three months, we wanted to work on a volunteer project that would bring us in touch with the community outside our artist village. Youthreach put us into contact with Akshay Pratishthan - a school for differently abled, socially and economically disadvantaged children. Founded in 1989, the school has over 400 students. Three artist volunteers quickly turned to five, which shortly turned to eight and in the end, eleven artists took part in varying degrees to create a 30' by 15' mural in the Akshay Pratishthan library.





Within a few days, the walls were prepped and our search for non-toxic lead-free paint was successful. We were ready. Children came in small groups to take part. Stencils of flowers and leaves were made for children with lower mobility.

Each day, we were greeted by many smiling faces, excited to see it progress and see if they could help paint. We quickly had dedicated helpers and many newcomers. We shared our suggestions for colour choices, placement and techniques and happily mixed together their preferred colours. It was especially wonderful to see children holding stencils so that another could paint.









Many sections of our original sketch came from pieces of the children's drawings or images we found in the school. A jungle theme was the obvious choice but a jungle that would reflect the place (the library) and Akshay Pratishthan being a rehabilitation centre that focuses on all levels of their development; the main focal point, an elephant reading the children a story under a banyan tree - Akshay Pratishthan's symbol, with many creatures, friends, characters, inspirational words filling in the details. ■

Maria divides her time between art institutions and making tiny objects from popular culture; dioramas of filmsets, sewing drawings from newspaper images, along with some short films and videos. She received her MFA in 2005 in Boston and is hoping to set up more permanent residence.





## Shopping for *epiphanies*

ART SELDOM GIVES YOU WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, BUT WHAT IT DOES GIVE YOU IS USUALLY SOMETHING BETTER. REALLY UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING ART IS DEPENDENT UPON SPENDING TIME WITH IT.

BY NATHAN LEWIS

Shopping is perhaps the common ground between us all. We go to stores looking for something: a striped pair of socks to match our fabulous red corduroys. We drive an extra five kilometres to the pump selling petrol at Rs. 45 as opposed to the ridiculously obscene Rs. 47 at the pump around the corner (how dare they!) We want to experience the difference between a non fat, half caffeinated, pumpkin vanilla spice latté and the average cup of coffee. We use the same skills to surf the internet. I typed in the phrase "Striped socks to go with my fabulous red corduroys" on Google and received 321 web sites to wade through.

Visiting a museum can be a daunting task for the uninitiated. Here, in grand halls, are hundreds of paintings that the culture has deemed worthy of study (why else would they have gilded frames?) After walking up, putting hand to chin as if in a gesture of deep thought, and muttering "beautiful," about five times, most people start thinking about pumpkin spice lattés and how long they have to hold up the façade of being interested.

Because my life is spent making pictures and teaching others to make them, I'm very comfortable in museums. It's more libraries that I find daunting. The sinking weight in my stomach when I see those thousands upon thousands of books on the shelf has





'The Abduction of the Sabine Women' (1633-34), Nicolas Poussin, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC

provided me with a sixth sense of locating restrooms quickly in libraries across the nation. I know for many, museums have a similar effect, but I'm here to tell you that looking at art can be very much like shopping. And those honed skills in web surfing are a great intro into art viewing.

Artists can be very focused on a particular subject or theme in their work and may take a trip to the museum to see the works through the scope of that subject. Say for instance, I need to paint a pair of hands and am having difficulty. I may take a run through the galleries, shopping strictly for that purpose. My agenda is a trip through the Museum of Handom. Obviously, there is no Museum of Handom, but for that day's purpose the local art museum goes by that name. Now because I'm looking strictly for well-painted hands, Rembrandt might be the worst painter ever born, so I quickly dismiss his paintings and spend my energy elsewhere. Now if I was shopping in the Museum of Deep Insight into the Human Psyche through Facial Expressions (MoDIHPFE), Rembrandt would be my man. Part of what makes paintings accessible is that the paintings don't get insulted if you dismiss them. They happily wait for the moment you are ready for them.

My point is, there are far too many works in a museum for one to contemplate them all. Being selective or having

someway to engage with the pictures, no matter how absurd, is the best way to prevent becoming overwhelmed and disconnected. It also might lead you to something more rewarding than what you sent out to find.

Setting out through a clothing store to find those striped socks that will match my fabulous red corduroys allows me to disregard 90% of the products in the store, but as I roam towards the socks section, I pass by a paisley shirt and - voila- I suddenly realize that paisley is the answer to my fashion trouble.

Art students are often made to draw from paintings in a museum. There are plenty of artist-related advantages that come from this activity and teachers will be the first people to load you up with these reasons. "Ah, you will channel the masters so that when you draw nature you will already have an idea of what to look for because you have seen it through the eyes of a master." This is all good and true, but I would like to argue that the greatest reward from time spent with art happens on a human level, and you needn't be an artist to experience it.

Ten years ago I was strolling through the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) trying to find the most compli-



cated composition to draw from. I had some time to spare and was hoping to improve my abilities on sketching. I chose Poussin's *Abduction of the Sabine Women* (left) strictly because it was busy and complex. About forty-five minutes into the drawing I noticed in a section of the painting the wielded swords of three different soldiers formed the sides of a perfect pentagon (see inset, left)!

Why in a painting depicting male aggression, physical brutality, and chaos between the sexes, was there also such a sense of orchestrated rhythm and clarity? The idea fascinated me and from this quirky little detail, I was led to contemplate larger issues of humanity. It was as if the painting was presenting visually a thought something along the lines of "we can't change incidents from the past but we are in control of our responses to them, we can bring clarity to them, and we can even let negative things affect us in positive ways". Now I didn't set out to come to this realization when I sat down in front of the painting. My purposes were much more mundane. Certainly the success of the experience wasn't the drawing, which looked like any other drawing, but the fact that I was engaged in a thought process and activity with the art, allowed something much better to happen.

Art seldom gives you what you're looking for, but what it does give you is usually something better. Really understanding and appreciating art is dependent upon spending time with it. Paintings are waiting to tell you things, but they do it in their own way. Overtime you learn to look at an image in many different ways. Experience breeds sensitivity and insight. In the same way, someone that regularly cooks may look at a bag of flour very different than one who bakes cookies for the first time. The experienced cook sees bread, dumplings, cake, pasta, pancakes, soufflés, tempura, and gravy. But even for the newbie, if the cookies come out right, there is incentive to return and engage again. ■



Nathan Lewis is an artist, educator, critic, hopeless romantic, espresso addict, Yankees fan. Lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut. MFA from Tufts University. Reviewed by Boston Globe and New York Times. Instructor of painting and drawing at Southern Connecticut State University and Paier College of Art, Connecticut. Since 2000 has shown in 25 exhibitions including four solo shows. Bordertown ADD, has a wooden leg and good at ice-skating. He finally found the perfect pair of striped socks. Nathan's blog: <http://hobowlison.blogspot.com>

## HOW TO VISIT A MUSEUM WITHOUT LOSING YOUR NERVE

- READ ABOUT THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION BEFOREHAND. SHOBITA PIRHALLI'S *MUSEUMS OF INDIA* (PENGUIN BOOKS, ISBN 0-14-022939-3) IS AN EXCELLENT REFERENCE.
- DON'T TRY TO SEE THE ENTIRE COLLECTION IN ONE VISIT. BETTER TO TAKE IT ON IF BITE SIZES. YOU CAN ALWAYS VISIT ANOTHER TIME.
- DON'T BE DAUNTED BY IMPATIENT MUSEUM VISITORS WHO WANT YOU TO MOVE ON SO THEY CAN HAVE A LOOK. UNLESS AS LONG AS YOU WANT TAKE NOTES, MAKE QUICK SKETCHES (CARRY A PENCIL INSTEAD OF A BALL-POINT OR INK PEN).
- MIND YOUR MUSEUM ETIQUETTE. DON'T TOUCH EXHIBITS OR GET TOO CLOSE. THE GUARDS WILL BE GRATEFUL.
- COURAGEOUS IN MANY MUSEUMS ARE HAPPY TO INTERACT WITH SINCERE VISITORS. WON'T TRYING TO ASK A QUESTION.

## 10 INDIAN MUSEUMS AND THEIR MUST-SEE EXHIBITS

### NATIONAL MUSEUM, DELHI

Artifacts from Harappan/ Buddhist/ Mughal Eras

### STATE MUSEUM OF PRAGA, BHAR

Mauryan collections. Look for the Galcha from Dholavira

### GOVERNMENT MUSEUM OF MATHURA, UTTAR PRADESH

Early Buddhist sculpture

### GOVERNMENT MUSEUM OF CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU

Pallava bronzes

### ASHUTOSH MUSEUMS, KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

Pala and Sena sculpture

### TANJORE ART GALLERY, TAMIL NADU

Chola and Pallava bronzes, and stone sculpture

### AHABRAHO SITE MUSEUM, MADHVA PRADESH

Chandela sculpture

### SALAR JUNG MUSEUM, HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH

Artifacts from the reign of Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan

### CALICO MUSEUM OF TEXTILES, AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT

Indian fabric

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART, DELHI

Contemporary Indian art





# WHY <sup>is</sup> <sup>a</sup> COW AND OTHER DELIBERATIONS

THE HUMAN MIND IS A CURIOUS THING; CURIOUS ABOUT EVERYTHING. WE CAN LOOK AROUND US AND SEE THE PRODUCTS OF THE FERTILE IMAGINATION OF THE HUMAN MIND EVERYWHERE.

BY MOHINISH SHUKLA

**W**e humans have an instinct to want to know. We want to know what the weather will be like tomorrow. We want to know what will happen when the smallest known particle is broken down. We want to know if that look across the room was meaningful. And we really want to know what will happen if this bright red button sitting under the warning sign is pushed. The instinct is hard-wired.

Kids are the best at this sort of thing - so are some adults. I like to believe that an essential part of that sub-community of *Homo sapiens* that people typically think of as wearing white coats, not having fun, wearing faded t-shirts and having just-electrocuted hairdos, is a kind of Peter Pan complex. For some things, some of us just never grow up.

## ASKING QUESTIONS

A long, long time ago, I read a book that said it was good to ask questions. And alongside this nugget of wisdom was a cartoon that showed a field with a standard stile, a standard cow, and a little boy asking his mom, "Ma, why is a cow?"

At that time, it seemed more like a technical drawing than a cartoon; like those explanatory, labeled cross-sectional figures of flowers you find in biology textbooks. And I've followed the ask-questions injunction quite steadfastly into what is technically my adulthood. Because now I'm a licensed scientist, and I quite seriously believe that proper question-asking is key to being a good scientist. But I'm also convinced that



good question asking is vehemently not only for scientists. One does not need a degree to ask a good question. But I discovered that finding good answers was a different beast altogether.

#### FINDING ANSWERS

The fundamental scientific stance is to say that any question can be answered. But there are no rules of engagement for tackling questions. The mind fishes around, looking for answers; and if doesn't find any, makes one up anyway. For example, for a pretty long time, I believed that anything liquid had to contain water. It took a while to appreciate the idea that being liquid was a state that, in theory, any matter can take, if the conditions are right.

Therefore, seriously good answers also have to square with reality. The mind, hidden away inside the cranium, keeps making up pretty little stories. If you and your brother were called Grimm, you would keep in the fairies and the dragons, and fax off your work to your publisher. But if you and your brother were called Wright, you would wonder what kind of wings would keep a giant (optionally fire-breathing) reptilian beast up in the sky, and test scaled models in home-brewed wind tunnels.

So, the scientist has to deal with what Thomas Huxley called the "great tragedy of science – the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact." In return, a good hypothesis offers technology. The optical drive sitting inside my PowerBook relies on hypotheses about, amongst other things, the nature of light and of certain semiconductors. But how do you get to the answers in the first place? When I was at school, I was told that finding answers was easy. All you had to do was follow the Scientific Method.

#### THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

There is nothing like the Scientific Method. There is a method for making Champagne, and if you don't follow this *méthode champenoise*, it's not Champagne. There's no corresponding *méthode scientifique* that tells you how to do science. Just like there is no painting method, even if there are impressionists and cubists and the guys from Penny Arcade, there is no single scientific method, but there are schools of thought like the structuralists, the connectionists and the rationalists. As in art, each stands for a particular way of looking at the world.

Of course, scientists, being what they are, have asked – is there a scientific method? Some have insisted that there is, while others have said that there is no such monolithic notion. Personally, I'm pretty much on the fuzzy side.

So, let us, for the moment, say that there is a black box,

BUT I'M ALSO CONVINCED THAT GOOD QUESTION ASKING IS VEHEMENTLY NOT ONLY FOR SCIENTISTS. ONE DOES NOT NEED A DEGREE TO ASK A GOOD QUESTION. BUT I DISCOVERED THAT FINDING GOOD ANSWERS WAS A DIFFERENT BEAST ALTOGETHER.



called the scientific method. Its outcome is, typically, a model. For example, in the western tradition, Claudius Ptolemy the Greek had a model in which the earth was at the center (geocentric), while the sun swung around it. This makes complete sense; after all, we see the sun rise and set, and this is a good explanation why this is so. But the geocentric model could not satisfactorily account for several observations, like the motion of other planets, or the fact (observed by Galileo) that the planet Venus shows phases like the moon. And so Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler came up with the heliocentric (centered around the sun) model.

Of course, logically, the blatant evidence of the eyes – that the sun is seen to rise and set – is compatible both with the idea that (a) the earth is at the center and the sun runs laps around it, and (b) the sun is stationary and the earth pirouettes on her toes. In fact, the Indian astronomer Aryabhata (476 – 550 AD) had proposed a heliocentric model of the solar system, which was influential in the western heliocentric model, championed by the likes of Copernicus in the 16th and the 17th centuries.

So scientists build models. These models are simplified versions of the actual things; they are coherent systems that capture and explain the observations. However, the models



themselves are imaginary; they are essentially mental constructs. Think of the schoolbook version of the atom, with the central nucleus and electrons spinning around in their orbits. The model was made up by guys like Bohr and Rutherford, who themselves had never actually seen anything like an atom.

Models also make predictions. Imagine you made a clockwork model of the solar system. In fact, you don't have to make one, you can just go buy an orrery, which is just that. So suppose you found an orrery on ebay, you set it up, and configured it to how the solar system looks today. By running the clockwork, you can see what happens tomorrow, or the day after. Errors and mechanical failures aside, you will be able to predict the position of the various members of the solar system with sufficient accuracy.

In fact, the better your orrery, the better your prediction of what will happen be. Therein lies one practical and prosaic way of evaluating the model that the scientific process produces - it makes good predictions. And therein also lies the seed of advancement. For sometimes, someone finds a little piece of data that doesn't quite fit. So they try to fix their model - better gears, titanium cam shafts and the odd thump on the side like we do when the TV goes all jagged and whiny. And while they're fixing their models, along comes someone who not only thinks that the older model is crap, but also comes up with a better, shinier, sleeker and more efficient model. Rather like going from an IBM-XT to a MacBook Pro.

#### HETERODOXY: NOT CONFORMING WITH STANDARD BELIEFS

Big changes in science often start as the heretical mutterings of the fringe crowds. It is the refusal to take someone's word for it. A classic example is the spiral-staircase structure of DNA. When Jim Watson and F. Crick started thinking about the structure of DNA, the prevalent model was one by the very famous chemist, Linus Pauling. Skipping the details, Watson and Crick, essentially outsiders to the DNA community, simply put together existing pieces of the puzzle into a new model that not just accounted for most of the available structural and chemical data, but also suggested an elegant way in which DNA could replicate.

So, some scientific revolutions are based on heterodoxy, since they ask questions and propose answers that are in odds with the establishment. As an adult, whether as a parent, as an educator, or merely as someone who interacts with a child, you count as establishment.

Adults, as a group, lack the mental flexibility of children. Adults might be racist, but it's hard to imagine that the

week-old baby is as well. What drives the development of prejudices of any kind in the unprejudiced child? More generally, what underlies the loss of flexibility in adulthood? Intuitively, this flexibility appears to have a biological basis. We know, for example, that even physically, kids appear to heal better and quicker. Kids are also little geniuses at picking up languages. Several investigators across the world are beginning to unravel the story behind how the wetware (as the biological machinery is called) evolves over the lifetime of an individual.

#### SCIENCE IS NOT JUST A SUBJECT IN SCHOOL

Nor is art, or history or anything else. The divisions are just smudged lines that sometimes go so far into the other territory that the more staid might wag their fingers and call in the cavalry to maintain the LoC.

This introductory piece is intended to chart out, in very broad strokes, a certain attitude. At a personal level, I find this attitude most closely resembles a scientific attitude. But more and more I find, and we will explore, that the essentials of this attitude are not proprietary of the scientific

domain. The high-voltage hairstyle is optional. The desired end state of this attitude, the way I see it at least, is to help create a social atmosphere.

In the words of Tagore that we learnt at school, such a Shangrila would be one where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into frag-

ments by narrow domestic walls; and where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit. ■

BIG CHANGES IN SCIENCE  
OFTEN START AS THE  
HERETICAL MUTTERINGS  
OF THE FRINGE CROWDS.

Mohinish started out looking at microbes and writing programs. He has since been interested in how yeast cells respond to stress, how rat testes pack DNA into sperms, how forests are structured, what information rats receive from their whiskers, how we hear fluent speech as a series of words. He loves cooking, video games, science fiction, PG Wodehouse and other junk. His current stable pointer is [mohinish.s.googlepages.com](http://mohinish.s.googlepages.com)





## THE BROTHERS GRIMM

118 MINS     RATING: PG-13

DIRECTOR: TERRY GILLIAM CAST: MATT DAMON, HEATH LEDGER, JONATHAN PRYCE, LENA HEADEY, PETER STORMARE, MONICA BELLUCCI

This is not a film about the real Grimm brothers. Instead, it is a fairy tale about Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, inset with several other interconnected fairy tales. What could be a more fitting ode to the brothers whose riveting tales have forever altered the way children think of cottages in the wood, or visits to granny's house. So, in Terry Gilliam's version, we have the hard-nosed Will and the trusting Jake, wheeling-dealing their way through early 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, using fakery and hired actors to rid villages of witches and curses. In return for bag of coins, of course. It is interesting to see the lead cast in unexpected roles. Damon is the brash, fast-talking ladies man and the hunky Ledger is the painfully shy younger brother who will one day immortalize their experiences into fairy tale.



The tricksters run up against more than they bargained for when they meet Napoleon's man in Germany, the cold Delatombe (Jonathan Pryce) who sends them off to a forest where uncanny events make children of the village disappear. Slight problem: this time the forest seems to be really enchanted. Complete with the insurmountable tower inhabited by a cruel queen (the resplendent Bellucci) who wants eternal youth, at any cost. It is left to the stoic but comely huntress (Lena Headey) to help the clueless brothers navigate through the wilderness.

Their time in the village marks the coming of age of the brothers. Their cowardly bluster gives way to a genuine sense of responsibility towards protecting the young - precursor to a career of writing dark, cautionary fairy tales!

Gilliam's direction makes for over-the-top visual stimulation. When you look at the movie, it looks like an illustrated fairy tale. Its texture is breathtaking (the kind whose pleasures grow with repeated viewings). And in the midst of this, the embryo of various Grimm's fairy tales - Jack and the Beanstalk, Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella - all woven slyly into the storyline.

The brothers are alternately besieged and bewildered by strange forces and creatures of other worlds, and they often struggle to break on through to the other side...at which point the storyline falls apart at the seams. Despite Gilliam's flourishes, he never quite manages to stitch together all the subplots; some of the performances are caricature-like and over-the-top (Stormare, for one), and the pop-psychological explanation for the brothers' interest in the use/abuse of enchantment never rings true. The fractured screenplay (by Ehren Kruger) doesn't quite do justice to the idea that old fairy tales might be all that's left of a powerful, pre-Christian world.

There is an eerie quality to the Grimm stories that had been lacking in their previous cinematic renditions. 'The Brothers Grimm' is as dark as the fairy tales themselves. It is a quality that maverick director Terry Gilliam (Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Brazil, 12 Monkeys) is renowned for. The result is sometimes scattered, sometimes magical, but always a sumptuous visual feast (scruffy CGI wolf notwithstanding). ■



## THE REAL BROTHERS GRIMM

Jakob Ludwig Carl Grimm and Wilhelm Karl Grimm were born in 1785 and 1786, respectively, in Hanau near Frankfurt in Hesse. They were among the six children of a prosperous lawyer. The family was reduced to poverty after the death of their father and grandfather.

The two brothers were educated at the Friedrichs Gymnasium in Kassel and read law at the University of Marburg. They were in their early twenties when they began the linguistic and philological studies that would culminate in their collected editions of fairy and folk tales. Though their collections of tales became very popular, they were mainly a byproduct of the linguistic research which was the Brothers' primary goal.

Less well known to the general public is the Brothers' work on a German dictionary, the first major step in creating a standardized "modern" German language since Martin Luther's translation of the Bible to German.

In the time in which the Brothers Grimm lived, Germany as we know it today did not yet exist; it consisted of hundreds of principalities and small or mid-sized countries. The unifying factor for the German people of the time was a common language. There was no significant German literary history. So part of what motivated the Brothers was the desire to help create a German identity.





## Happily Ever After

### OLD TALES, NEW REALITY

With a growing brigade of young nieces and nephews in charge of my life, I have been re acquainted with fairytales. There are kings, queens, handsome princes and beautiful princesses. There are witches, elves, fairies and animals that can talk. Stories in which, without exception, someone gets poisoned or murdered or dies horribly. If no one is poisoned or murdered, then there is the huge chasm between the haves and the have-nots. The ugly princess is invariably the wicked princess (Snow White's beautiful stepmother being the only noteworthy exception). The Little Mermaid throws herself into the sea instead of stabbing the cad Prince.

To keep from bursting a blood vessel on account of the political incorrectness that is rife in this children's literature, it is vital to know where it is coming from.

During the nineteenth century, both fairy tales and childhood came to represent an elevated imaginary state. Earlier religious myths were transformed into a new myth of Original Innocence (in contrast to the myth of Original Sin). The child became the image of innocence in an Edenic state, as opposed to the fallen adult.

Fairy tales seem to address common human themes; they offer solutions, potential paths to be taken, and happy endings to be won. They have often been described as being "universal". But in them we frequently find ideologies

(about both gender and social class) that are far from liberating.

Modern scholars of fairy tales note that there is no 'original' version of a fairy tale. Elizabeth Wanning Harries (author of *"Twice Upon a Tale: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale"*) has noted, "Though (fairy tales) may have roots in oral narratives, all the stories that we now call fairy tales have been written and rewritten, printed and reprinted over centuries."

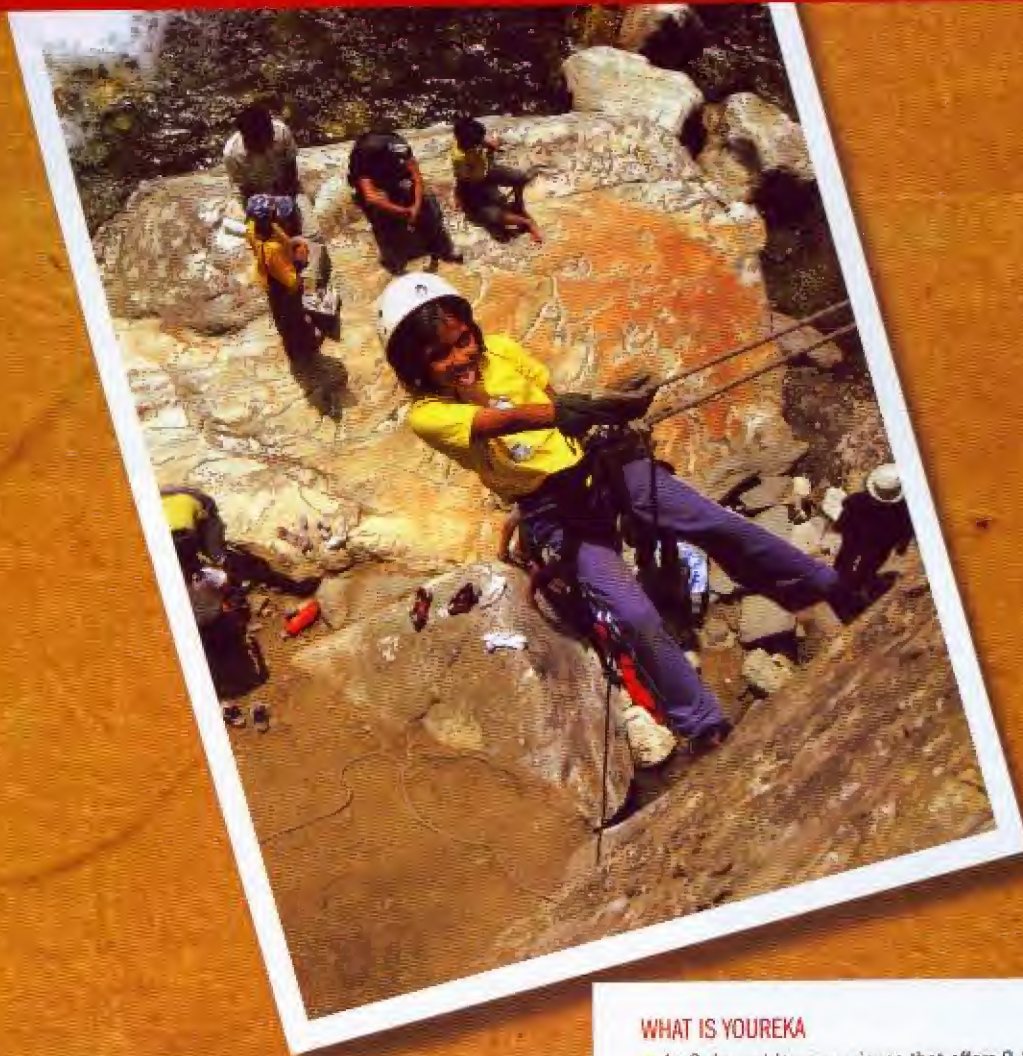
Each variant of a tale was unique to its circumstances, its geographic locale, its chronological period, its cultural norms, and the idiosyncrasies of its teller. Which means that each era *tapered its fairy tales to suit the need of the hour*, though a common thread continued to run through!

Maybe the real problem is not the outdated tales, but our own desire to chloroform the tradition of storytelling and freeze its voice in some dated past. Maybe what we need to do is continue to tell the stories - as we need to hear them in our time.

As for the beautiful princesses and their ugly step-sisters, I just make it a point to add a footnote for my niece about how the 'beautiful' stands for personal qualities rather than a beauty queen face. A little unnecessary, really, considering that her favourite fairy tale of all is 'Shrek'. Which, as anyone knows, is about an ogre who is the good guy, who wins the hand of the princess, who turns into an ogre in the end. And they live happily ever after. ■



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# CHRONICLES OF A BRAND NEW TEACHER

STARRING KARI  
'ETERNAL LAWS OF THE SCHOOL GROUND'







ARM YOURSELF WITH THE TERMINOLOGY AND 'EDUCATOR SPEAK' USED THE WORLD OVER.

#### ACCESSING SKILLS

Teaching kids how to learn (how to access information or look things up) rather than transmitting specific knowledge to the students; the reasoning is that knowledge and technology changes too rapidly to bother with transmitting 'soon-to-be-outmoded facts.' As a result, schools teach kids how to depend on the dictionary, encyclopedia, etc.

#### AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

A laudatory term for grading 'real-world' (i.e. applied) projects. These projects can include, among others, letters, exhibitions, producing a play, or solving a practical mathematical problem. Teachers feel this method of measurement is better than teaching through separate subjects and grading by objective multiple-choice exams.

#### BANKING THEORY OF SCHOOLING

Educators who use this phrase reject the notion that teachers should convey a core of knowledge to students because they feel that it merely indoctrinates students. In lieu of this educators teach 'critical-thinking skills.'

#### BREAK-THE-MOLD SCHOOLS

This phrase has been used by reformers since the 1980s. Some of the changes have helped schools and parents. However, Hirsch claims that many of these reforms are simply re-worked versions of failed progressive methods. He suggests that if a school is already achieving successful results, there is no practical reason to jump on a bandwagon and experiment with our children's minds.

#### CHILD-CENTERED SCHOOLING

(Also known as student-centered education)

Educators preferring this philosophy believe they should 'teach the child, not the subject.' They reject the idea of lectures, drills, and rote learning because, according to them, it ignores the 'feelings' and 'individuality' of the child.

#### COMPETITION

Many progressive educators see this word in negative terms. They disagree with grading because it 'forces' students into higher and lower tracks. They believe students will learn for the sake of learning if their self esteem is not deflated by competition.



#### CONSTRUCTIVISM

Proponents of constructivism suggest that the only knowledge worth acquiring is that which a student finds for one's self because it is more likely to be remembered and used.

#### COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Basically, this means splitting a class into groups to work on a joint assignment. Teachers like this idea because it results in fewer papers to grade, it allows for peer tutoring, and it supposedly does away with an emphasis on competition.

#### CRITICAL-THINKING SKILLS

This term refers to the ability to analyze ideas and solve problems in an independent fashion by developing the ability to locate a main idea and look it up in resources.

#### DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE

If a teacher uses this term, he or she is suggesting that a child's innocence needs to be preserved by not exposing the student to early hard work. The child will learn when he is 'ready.'

#### DISCOVERY LEARNING

(Also known as hands-on learning)

This teaching method offers students projects to work on rather than textbooks to read. Teachers feel that students will be more likely to remember what they learn from the experience than they would from reading and 'regurgitating' facts.

#### FACTORY-MODEL SCHOOLS

Some educators will use this term as a perjorative against traditional teaching methods that are typically associated with lectures, chairs in rows, rote memorization, 'regurgitation' of facts, and a lack of spontaneity in the classroom.

#### HOLISTIC LEARNING

A term for classroom learning organized around integrated, lifelike problems and projects rather than around standard subject-matter disciplines. Educators hope to make learning 'relevant' to life.

#### INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

This essentially means tutorial-like teaching for every child - an impossibility in classrooms that typically have a student/teacher ratio of 20:1.

#### INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES

Not all students learn the same way. Some kids are verbal learners, others are visual, etc.

#### INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

A phrase denoting the knowledge and skills a person possesses at a given moment. Intellectual capital is like money in the bank; the more you possess, the more you can acquire.

#### LEARNING TO LEARN

This term refers to the tool conception of learning. The argument educators make in its favor is that information becomes outdated, but the ability to find information doesn't. Therefore, teaching facts is a waste of time. But the tool conception, which makes the fish inferior to the hook, line, and sinker, is based upon a gravely inadequate metaphor of the skill of learning. Indeed, even learning how to fish requires a great deal of domain-specific knowledge.

#### LESS IS MORE

The term means that depth is more important than breadth.

#### METACOGNITIVE SKILLS

The broadest meaning of the term is identified with 'accessing skills,' 'critical-thinking skills,' and 'problem-solving skills.'

#### MULTIAGED CLASSROOMS

The resurgence of this concept results in classrooms grouped by abilities rather than age-groups. Progressive teachers like it because it fits with their concept of 'learning at one's own pace.'

#### MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Psychologist and author Howard Gardner's theory suggests that there are seven domains of ability under which every student can learn: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal. Multiple learning styles.

#### PASSIVE LISTENING

A progressivist phrase caricaturing 'traditional' education, which makes children sit silently in rows in 'factory-model schools,' passively listening to what the teacher has to say, then merely memorizing facts through 'rote learning,' and finally 'regurgitating' the facts verbatim.

#### PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

The original term used by specialists in the psychometric literature for what is called variously 'authentic assessment,' 'exhibitions,' and 'portfolio assessment.' In simple terms, it means a student would receive a grade for an entire essay or a musical performance, just as they might in the real world.

#### PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

An extended version of 'performance-based assessment.' Collections of works done during the year are kept in a folder and graded as a whole - aiming to reward improvement over time.

#### PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

In a narrow sense, it refers to the ability to solve problems in mathematics or other specialized fields. More broadly, it



## 10 QUESTIONS ★

*Aditi Ramanathan,  
24 years, Science Teacher and  
MYP co-ordinator, Indus  
International School,  
Bangalore*



**WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?**  
Nungambakkam, Chennai.  
I have a Bsc from Stella  
Maris and an MSc from  
Ethiraj College for Women  
- both in Chennai.

**WHY TEACHING INSTEAD OF THE  
SWARM OF EDUCATIVE CAREER  
OPTIONS?**

No one who knows me was  
surprised that I became a  
teacher. It suits the kind of  
person I am. Teaching was a  
stop-gap experience, but it  
became clear very soon that  
this is what I wanted to be  
doing. My favourite age  
group is the 11-12 year  
olds. They are such a store-  
house of energy and enthu-  
siasm!

**HOW DO YOU BEGIN YOUR MORNING  
RITUAL?**

I begin and end my work  
day with a cup of coffee.  
Filter coffee, always in a  
beautiful mug.

**WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG RIGHT NOW?**  
IT'S A VERY LARGE BAG.

Notes, worksheets,  
mindmaps, textbooks, cell  
phone, 'The Mammoth  
Book of Historical  
'Whodunnits'.

**HOW DO YOU WALK THE LINE  
BETWEEN FUN AND DISCIPLINE?**

It takes me less than a  
month to set ground rules  
with a new class. Being  
young is an advantage, they  
relate to me better. They  
know we can have fun as  
long as we are learning and  
there is no distraction/  
destruction on the side! My  
students know that I love

my subject very much. They  
respect that.

**FAVOURITE TEACHING AIDS?**

Role-play. Illustrated work-  
sheets. Hands-on assign-  
ments (we pretty much  
brought the laboratory into  
my 6<sup>th</sup> grade class).

**WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE  
BOOKS?**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's  
'One Hundred Years of  
Solitude', Jeanette  
Winterson's 'Written on the  
Body', Margaret Atwood's  
'The Blind Assassin', Jeffrey  
Eugenides' 'Middlesex'

**HOW DO YOU UNWIND?**

I play a mean game of bad-  
minton. Or solve the cross-  
word puzzle in Deccan  
Herald.

**SIDE-EFFECTS OF BEING A YOUNG  
TEACHER?**

You grow mature beyond  
your years. I feel older than  
most people my age, and  
have to remind myself to  
enjoy things like just hang-  
ing out and fooling around.  
I think it's the responsibility  
that goes with teaching. You  
are accountable to a very  
large number of very young  
people. That changes you.

**IF YOU'RE A BURGER**

I'd be within four walls in  
some corner of the world  
researching something in  
the field of genetics! ■

refers to a general resourcefulness and skill that will enable  
the student to solve various future problems.

**PROJECT METHOD**

A phrase used to describe the naturalistic form of teaching  
devised by W. H. Kilpatrick at the beginning of the pro-  
gressive education movement in 1918. Kilpatrick's method  
condones giving up subject-matter teaching in favor of  
'holistic' real-life projects. The method rejects the notion of  
lectures, tests, grades, and drills. Terminology has changed  
over the years to 'discovery learning, hands-on learning,  
holistic learning, learning by doing,' and 'thematic learn-  
ing.'

**ROTE LEARNING**

Rote learning used to mean asking an entire class to recite  
in unison answers to set questions, whether or not they  
understood the meaning of the question or the answer.  
Today, educators define rote learning variously as 'spouting  
words,' 'memorization without understanding,' and isolated  
facts. The teachers feel that these things prevent students  
from becoming independent thinkers.

**TEACH THE CHILD, NOT THE SUBJECT**

Famous battle cry of progressivism is that one should attend  
to the moral, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the  
child at the same time that one is providing an excellent  
grounding in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

**TEXTBOOK LEARNING**

A phrase disparaging traditional forms of education, sym-  
bolized by textbooks, in favor of more 'holistic' and lifelike  
modes of instruction in which knowledge is gained from  
hands-on experience rather than from verbal statements in  
textbooks.

**THEMATIC LEARNING**

The 'holistic' teaching of different subject matters across a  
common theme. For instance, the theme of 'The Seasons'  
might combine a study of history, art, science, and mathe-  
matics in a particular classroom, or grade, or throughout  
the entire school.

**WHOLE-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION**

A phrase denoting an approach to the teaching of reading  
that emphasizes the joy of good literature and avoids drill-  
like instruction in letter sounds. In theory, the method is  
supposed to motivate children by emphasizing an interest  
and pleasure in books, and by encouraging students to learn  
reading holistically, just as they learned their mother  
tongue—as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game.'



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# PENGUINS AND ROBOTS

A CASE AGAINST UNIFORMS

**W**e expect parents to make children wear clothes that are comfortable, easy-to-manage clothes and easy-to-wear shoes that are necessary for games and physical exercises

CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT. LET SCHOOL EXPRESS THIS TRUTH.

Children who have the option to express themselves are more accepting of those who are different. An individual's style comes from many places: background, environment, their own character. Limiting the dress choice does not make them same or similar.

"It is OK to be different", "Be yourself," "Don't be afraid to stand out." These words have been spoken so many times to us from childhood to adulthood. We say that each child is unique and in the same breath, we try to bring about a superficial uniformity. Uniforms contradict the self-expression and creativity teachers have been trying to instill in students for so many years. Forcing students to wear uniforms takes away their ability to show their uniqueness - a quality that ought to be encouraged throughout the education process.

THE EQUITY ARGUMENT IS FALLACIOUS & ERRONEOUS

The 'equity' argument goes like this: if children wear uniforms, they will not notice differences between children from rich and from poor families, they will not be envious of each other's clothes. This 'equity' argument is often put forward by State Schools. The reason for this may be that it is a purely socialist argument and it may be rejected for this reason alone. Even as a socialist argument, it does not make much sense. School uniforms may make all students look alike. Why, then, are teachers exempt from the evenness? The teacher is allowed to dress casually, while the student has to wear uniforms!

CHILDREN OBSESS WITH CLOTHES BECAUSE PARENTS DO

Are we really saying that many children are so obsessed with their looks that their work are being affected? A young child obsessed with clothing reveals a deeper social malaise. Let's not pretend to disguise it by forcing uniforms. Let's address it by giving them something else to obsess with.

We should be concerned about keeping children absorbed

and engaged in our school activities and clothes should be viewed as a necessity and not a fashion statement. The demands of the future include qualities such as assertiveness, creativity, individuality, originality, a spontaneous personality, taking initiatives, being able to cope with change, etc. Uniformity is not something to be proud of.

THE 'EASE/ ELIMINATE CHOICE' ARGUMENT IS INCONSISTENT, INCOMPLETE

The 'ease' argument says that school uniforms make it easier for students to choose what they are to wear at school. The point is that the 'choice' is not so much made 'easy' by virtue of uniformity, the choice is easy because there is no choice. The real question is if choice is good for children.

Taking away children's right to choose what to wear does not make life any easier, it just makes children accustomed to conformity, to following orders and walking in line without thinking, without making a choice. This creates a huge amount of psychological problems later in life, it reduces the opportunity to make choices, it reduces the overall quality of life. If parents otherwise ask children what to wear when they are going for a movie, for play, for games, then why can't they give the choice as to what children should wear to school?

There is no substantial research to show that school uniforms have a positive impact on children, bring about a sense of belonging, create healthy emotional climate or promote growth and achievement in schools. There are schools in many parts of India that do not have school uniforms and are progressive schools that we look up to. It is all about creating a caring classroom community for our children.

When we talk to children, many of them suggest that there should be no uniforms because it is ugly, and makes them look like they are going for an army parade. Who needs a landscape dominated by penguin esque uniformity and robotic sameness? ■

Ashish is the CEO of IDiscover Centre for Education and Enterprise. He has lived and worked in places as diverse as Russia, France, India and the USA. He has an MBA from XLRI and an Ed.M. in Mind, Brain & Education from Harvard University.